ISSUE #007
May 2025

RED AMERICA

JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY

RED AMERICA

Issue #007
May 2025

Publisher: American Communist Party
Website: acp.us
Email: redamerica@acp.us

ISBN: 978-1-300-28879-4

Copyright © 2025

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher. The views or positions presented in articles featured in Red America do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the American Communist Party, nor should the publication of any article be taken to mean endorsement of its content.

Cover art: At Madrid Coal Mine, New Mexico by Carl Redin. This piece is in the public domain and is reproduced without copyright restrictions.

Issue number: #007
Published: May 2025

Contents

1 Message from the Chairman
Haz Al-Din

5 From the 'Kingdom of Paradise' to the Kingdom of Freedom: Unearthing American Civilization
Volk Vulture

19 Henryk Grossman: The Best Defender of Marx and Capital
Ted Reese

29 From Engels to Western "Marxism": The Eclipse of Dialectical Materialism
Giannetto Edoardo (Nanni) Marcenaro

43 A Comprehensive Look at the Dialectical Materialist Worldview
Carlos L. Garrido

75 The Contradiction of Exchange and Use Value in American Healthcare
Eddie Liger Smith

1

Message from the Chairman

Haz Al-Din[1]

Comrades of the American Communist Party,

This month will witness the confirmation of the first democratically-elected national body of our Party's leadership, the Central Committee.

Upon the confirmation of the Central Committee, our Party's institution of democratic centralism will finally be complete.

Many have attempted to critique our Party on the basis that it did not launch with all of the institutions and structures that make possible the full and comprehensive observance of the basic principle of democratic centralism. But as a newly reconstituted Party, facing circumstances of the complete breakdown and collapse of not only the institutions of Marxism-Leninism in the West, but even the minimal semblance of a worker's movement, it could not be possible that our Party could observe the principle of democratic centralism at the outset without first observing the bare minimum of practical activity, to flesh out the scope, scale and reality of the very subject of democracy in the first place - practical activity on a collective level.

---

1. Haz Al-Din is the Executive Chairman of the American Communist Party. He is a political theorist and thought-leader for the Infrared Media Collective.

In the months since the ratification of our Party constitution, a sufficient degree of experience has been acquired by the cadre of our Party in accomplishing the basics of coordinating, organizing, and carrying out practical tasks while maintaining collective discipline. Our Party is beginning to mature and a genuine, sincere, organic attitude and spirit of collective existence is beginning to take hold among our Party cadre.The fundamental prerequisites by way of Party culture and experience for the confirmation of a democratically elected body of experienced and capable cadre have therefore been met. It is now clear what the subject of democratic decision making actually is - not empty and hollow conceits of purely individual opinion, not the arbitration of purely metaphysical questions, but democratic decision making over our Party's commitments at a collective and practical level.

It is therefore necessary to point out that a fundamental transformation at the level of our Party culture, and a new test of resolve for our Party discipline will begin upon the confirmation of the Central Committee. A lively spirit of discussion, productive debate, and criticism is now possible according to the principles and within the framework of democratic centralism. The next decisive chapter and test for our Party will be for the ability of cadre to express contrary views from one and another without such contentions devolving into breaches of discipline and our shared, practical commitments as a Party. As our declaration states plainly, the united mission that fastens the bonds of association is the common development of history, and the bare minimum of an observance of that common development - not as an ideological dogma, but as a practical principle of shared commitment with respect to this development - is at the foundation of both the American Communist Party and all Communist Parties throughout history.

It is necessary to remember that the principle of collective organization and discipline is not merely an ideological conceit, but a type of practical commitment that is fundamentally non-reducible to any individual's given point-of-view. Such is the line that separates a Party of mere individuals from a truly collective organization. While individuals may be free to debate the particular content of that practical commitment, that there must be a common, collective practical commitment is non-negotiable. Therefore, regardless of an individual's point of view, the observance of collective discipline is also non-negotiable. Only by translating the individual point of view into a truly collective form, via the correct observance of both procedure and a genuine ability to persuade the majority of ones comrades through dialogue, does it acquire objectivity and reality with respect to our Party.

Comrades, the confirmation of the Central Committee imposes a newfound degree of responsibility of cadre within our Party for the leadership and direction of our Party's future. The Central Committee is a democratically elected body at the scale of national leadership. Together with the Executive Board and the Politburo, it completes the entirety of the central organs of leadership within our Party. Newfound power comes with newfound responsibilities and obligations, and a newfound degree of skin-in-the-game. While the major decisions of the Executive Board are now accountable at a democratic level, so too does this confer upon the Central Committee the shared responsibility of acting in the best interests of the Party overall, and carrying out to the best of its ability the shared goals and objectives of our Party.

I have full trust and confidence that a lively and powerful culture of democratic centralism will begin to take root in our Party, that our Party will grow ever-more resilient to disruption, individualism and unruliness, and that the confirmation of the Central Committee will make our Party far more powerful and capable as an organization.

2

From the 'Kingdom of Paradise' to the Kingdom of Freedom: Unearthing American Civilization

Volk Vulture[1]

Socialism was an unbounded dream… America, too, was an unbounded dream[2]

These lines open the first two paragraphs of Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell's roughly 200-page chapter in "Socialism and American Life", a contribution to the *Princeton Studies in American Civilization* series. While this work rightfully rests its descriptions of early American socialist development on Christian communitarian experimental utopias, its second volume explains that such globe-spanning social reform & religious movements of the time also had "fullest expression in the United States, and… certain peculiarly American

---

1. V. Vulture is an American citizen and ACP supporter.

2. Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism In the United States." in *Socialism And American Life*, Vol 1., ed. Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 215.

characteristics."[3] Elsewhere, the book is keen to point out a "Christian Basis of Scientific Socialism"[4] as well. However, for Daniel Bell himself, in highlighting socialism's tendency to "fail to adapt to the American scene,"[5] a certain ingrained Cold War tendency shows through that dishonestly separates long-standing "pre-1917" American socialist and labor traditions from Bolshevism. Even without accounting for this and similar biases among the "nonaligned" or "unaffiliated" historians of American socialist history, some dreams are bound to come true.

Today, socialism as it actually exists is neither unbounded, nor a dream. Can the same be said for American civilization? M. Kammen once observed that, like the Arabian phoenix, American civilization "is said to exist, but no one knows where."[6] It won't be argued that Daniel Bell was an avowed American Communist or Marxist, and for all his scholarly work in this area, he leaves out important early examples, one of which features centrally here. However, if it may be said that distinct American ethnogenesis involves a "stripping away" of form in this way, or as Lenin says a "smoothing out" of national narrowness and breaking down of vast national differences "as nowhere else in the world"[7], then this would paradoxically promise a more tightly-bound and cohered historical basis for civilizational development. Not merely along ethnic or national lines, but also in recognition of a fundamentally shared legacy. Now, will such a phrase be allowed to catch up to the content? The infamous late 19th century "Turner thesis" argues that almost all aspects of American social and economic development have their motive factor tied directly to Westward expansion. Turner laments that "[t]oo exclusive attention has been paid… to the Germanic origins, too little to the American factors… [t]he frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization."[8] A similar argument might

---

3. Donald D. Egbert and Stow Person, *Socialism and American Life,* Vol. 2, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 92.

4. Albert T. Mollegen, "The Religious Basis of Western Socialism", in *Socialism And American Life*, Vol 1., ed. Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 109.

5. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, (Glencoe, Il.: The Free Press, 1960), 268.

6. Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization*, (New York and Toronto: Random House, Inc. and Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto, 1973), xi.

7. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 23*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 2nd ed., 1974), 276.

8. Frederick Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier In American History", in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for The Year 1893*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 201.

be made for both early Communist history and emerging American civilization generally.

Most relevant for the present is Turner's statement that initially, "[t]he wilderness masters the colonist… [i]t finds him in European dress… strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasin… he fits himself into Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails."[9] Friedrich Engels too had a kind of "Turner thesis" of his own that he divulged around the same time period. In 1895, Engels describes interacting historical oppositions in 19th century America as they sprawled over the landscape. He points out that although some think "America is the *youngest* it is also the *oldest* country in the world... [h]ence the UPS AND DOWNS of the movement, according to which point of view takes precedence in the average person's mind—that of the urban working man or that of the peasant engaged in reclamation."[10] For American Marxism then, undeniable Germanic origins are difficult to overemphasize. Yet, on a cultural level, the living conditions and social specificities of American life, in town & country alike, dictate this development such that Engels says "Americans will have to learn almost exclusively by practice, and relatively little from theory."[11]

Looking backward over centuries of American civilizational practice, what once may have been unbounded dreams issue forth objectively and circumscribe these geographies of national and local modes of economic life. Expanding territorial dominion and ignominious human exchange gave shape both to American civilization and its organic socialist tendencies. The political surveying and emancipatory enclosure of this boundlessness become the real task of a nation's working class and its Party. Within this process as a global consideration, the various nations entering the historical stage of American civilization also simultaneously "dissolve" and are made anew. In 1613, Samuel Purchas had portended that "the tawnie Moore, blacke Negro, duskie Libyan, Ash-coloured Indian, Olive-coloured American, should, with the whiter European become one sheep-fold under one Great Sheepheard…(all this varieitie swallowed up into an ineffable unity)…. without any more distinction of Colour, Nation, Language, Sexe, Condition…"[12] A tall order, but what

9. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier", 201.

10. Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Friedrich A. Sorge, (January 16, 1895)", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 50, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 422.

11. Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Friedrich A. Sorge, (September 16, 1887)", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 48, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 104.

12. Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*. (London: William Stansby 4th ed., 1626), 723.

progress was ever made? Early in 18th century Canada, the French explorer de Lahontan relates a conversation he pretends to have had with the fictionalized indigenous chief 'Adario' who exhorts him to give up the "French" customs:

> *Believe me, my dear Brother, 'tis thy Interest to turn Huron, in order to prolong thy life. Thou shalt drink, eat, sleep, and Hunt with all the ease that can be; thou shalt be free'd from the Passions that Tyrannize… thou shalt have no Occasion for Gold or Silver to make thee happy… and if thou hast a mind to be King of all the World, why, thou shalt have nothing to do but to think that thou art so*[13]

Marx wrote of American tribes like the Creeks, Choctaws, Iroquois and Cherokees and others that not only had they been living a "dual" existence between horticulture and hunting-gathering, they also retained the "impress of a common mind."[14] During the 7 Years' War, Henry Bouquet, a Swiss mercenary once implicated in a damnable letter mentioning distribution of smallpox-infected blankets[15], wrote to George Washington complaining of hard-to-control Cherokees. Washington had ordered Bouquet to train and deploy these necessary indigenous allies against mutual Native tribal enemies, but Bouquet found this difficult, stating "it would be easier to make Indians of our White men, than to cox that damned Tanny Race."[16] In 1791, during what turned out to be one of America's first substantial and homegrown naturalist surveys, William Bartram also described some of the Southern American 'civilized' tribes, declaring that "[a]s moral men they certainly stand in no need of European civilization."[17] Whether Bouquet or Bartram were proven right in the long run is immaterial to the fact that such observations were shown to be true in practice decades before being theorized on parchment.

Specifically in early 18th century Cherokee country, a type specimen of the pre-revolution American frontier, one may witness German Christian radical

---

13. Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North-America*, Vol. 2, (London: printed for H. Bonwicke et. al., 1703), 149.

14. Karl Marx, *Ethnographical Notebooks*, (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1974), 172.

15. Francis Parkman, *Indian War after The Conquest of Canada*, Vol. II, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 6th ed., 1870), 39.

16. Henry Bouquet, "Letter to George Washington, (July 14, 1758)" [footnote 38], in *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 2, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 238.

17. William Bartram, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*. (Dublin: For. J Moore, W. Jones, R. McAllister, and J. Rice, 1793), 487.

utopianism and anti-colonial struggle taking shape along Communistic lines. Christian Priber precedes many of the Utopian socialists that Marx mentions by nearly a century. Although Priber himself was preceded in America by groups like the Labadists, a Dutch pietist commune in Maryland, they and others lacked the radical integration into indigenous society and grandiose vision of Priber who went to the Cherokees and "endeavoured to erect a sort of whimsical Republick amongst that barbarous people."[18] Around 1735-36 Priber had arrived in South Carolina and traveled overland to the large Cherokee capital of Tellico with just a trunk of books, ink and a pen.[19] After several years of living as a "great beloved man" with the Cherokee and all but becoming one of them, Priber was captured by Creek Indians, and turned over to English authorities. His personal papers, including an early Cherokee dictionary and manifesto outlining his utopian vision were lost or destroyed. Priber was accused of Jesuitism, French colonialist intrigue and subsequently imprisoned in Anglo-controlled Georgia, where he later died. While living with the Cherokee and instructing them in such matters as weights and measures, Priber was said to have devised a revolutionary scheme of "setting up a Town at the Foot of the Mountains among the Cherokees, which was to be a City of Refuge for all Criminals, Debtors, and Slaves who would fly thither from Justice or their Masters."[20] That the many other early American utopian experiments were either more or less 'successful' is less remarkable here.

What Priber did was to confirm Turner's claim 150 years before it was made. Priber, "being a great Scholar he soon made himself master of [the Cherokee] Tongue, and by his insinuating manner Indeavoured to gain their hearts, he trimm'd his hair in the indian manner & painted as they did going generally almost naked except a shirt & a Flap."[21] Such American Communist enthusiasm breaks a daunting fourth wall between historical observer and historically observed. Long before Morelly or Rousseau actively formulated any system of utopian rationality, Priber had informed a French captive of the Cherokees that in his imagined society, which tribal leaders apparently had already adopted, that all property was to be held in common and "each would

18. Samuel Boyse, *An Historical Review of the Transactions of Europe,* Vol. 1, (London: D. Henry in Friar Street, 1747), 396.

19. Verner W. Crane, "A Lost Utopia of The First American Frontier.", *The Sewanee Review,* Vol. 2, Iss. 1., January, 1919, 48-61.

20. "Historical Relation of Facts Delivered By Ludovick Grant, Indian Trader, To His Excellency the Governor of South Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Vol.. 10, Iss. 1, January 1909: 54-68.

21. "Historical Relation of Facts Delivered By Ludovick Grant", 59.

find what he needed, whether for subsistence, or the other needs of life; that each should contribute to the good of the society, as he could."[22] Priber envisioned this society and referred to it "under the name of the Kingdom of Paradise."[23] Though Priber could not actually predict the future, later scholars have been at pains to properly place him, with one commentator saying Priber "combined a mixture of primitivism and perfection…"[24] In 1940, Priber was commended as having "planned to set up in America two hundred years ago a civilization strikingly like that proposed for Soviet Russia"[25], but is this only exaggeration? Unique as American Communist history, but not distinct in its untimely and obscure conclusion. Though ranked among the many failures in a long non-agnatic line of original American utopians, Priber also manifests and allows a kind of dynastic historical indexing of emerging civilization and socialist development across the continent.

F. Turner convincingly argues that the Atlantic coast of North America was "the frontier of Europe in a real sense", but "[m]oving westward, the frontier became more and more American,"[26] so too Priber had gone about his task. To illustrate the importance with which this recognition of American Civilization sets itself apart from the European, James Oglethorpe in 1743 wrote to England saying that Priber desired to "have a great resort hither from the debtors, transport felons, servants and negro slaves…"[27] and all others who sought to flee Anglo domination. Yet Oglethorpe himself had previously sold the idea of a Georgia colony on the promise of a similar "utopia" of sorts, but the presence of fugitive slaves and debtors upended this. These failures of 18th century European utopian socialist & Christian intentional communities did not abate in the 19th century either. American Shakers were admitted by Engels as having been the first in the world to successfully put "community of goods"[28] into practice, and also accepted indigenous and Free persons-of-color members. One Shaker elder described how he "was sent on a school mission, to teach the

---

22. Antoine Bonnefoy, "JOURNAL OF ANTOINE BONNEFOY, 1741-1742", in *Travels in the American Colonies,* ed. Newton D. Mereness, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 248-249.

23. Bonnefoy, "JOURNAL OF ANTOINE", 249.

24. Knox Mellon, Jr. "Christian Priber's Cherokee 'Kingdom of Paradise' ", *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 57 Iss. 3, (Fall, 1973), 320.

25. Herbert R Sass, *Hear Me, My Chiefs!,* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1940), 77.

26. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier", 201.

27. H.A. Scomp, "Georgia, The Only Free Colony", *The Magazine of American History*, Vol. 22 Iss. 4, (October, 1889), 287.

28. Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 3, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence& Wishart, 2010), 215.

Indians of the Five Nations… [but admired the lives of] these poor natives of the wilderness; and to contrast it with the sophistry, superficial pomp and artful dissimulation, so common in countries and among nations claiming the exalted benefits of civilization."[29] Even in the late 18th century, it was surmised these American utopian socialisms would not endure, despite a Kelpius or a Priber's good nature and rapport among the country's inhabitants. Peter Miller, the leader of another celibate religious community at Ephrata, wrote to Ben Franklin in the 1770s stating, "since we have no Successors, the Genius of the Americans is bound another way."[30] Or, as in the case of Priber, perhaps descendants do not require direct parentage, since "Christian Priber's dream for America… essentially the same dream that came to… life in Russia… afterward. That it had birth two centuries ago in the American wilderness is a fact almost too strange to be believed."[31]

Albert Fried once observed that socialism was such an "integral part of the American past" that here "lay the root of its 'failure'… its inability to develop."[32] Yet Marx points out that one of the earliest modern descriptions of a labor theory of value had been made by Benjamin Franklin in the 1720s[33], years before Ephrata or Priber had come into prominence. Marx also freely admits that the 1820s saw a huge American movement in industrial labor and the emergence of one of the first specifically workers' parties in history. The Workingmen's Party in 1829 was emphatic in proclaiming, "[t]he working classes have taken the field, and never will they give up the contest till the power that oppresses them is annihilated."[34] The New England Workingmen's Association declared in 1845, that if the laboring man's condition was lamentable "that of woman is worse, and increasingly so."[35] So if Marx could acknowledge an American primeval indigenous Communism, a homegrown modern radical labor tradition & worker's party of domestic American origin,

---

29. Samuel Johnson, "Testimony of Samuel Johnson", *Testimonies Concerning The Character and Ministry of Mother Ann Lee*, ed. Seth Y. Wells (Albany, NY: Packard & Van Benthuysen, 1827), 105.

30. Peter Miller, "Letter to Benjamin Franklin, (June 12, 1771)", in *A Unique Manuscript by Rev. Peter Miller (Brother Jabez),* ed. Julius F. Sachse, (Lancaster, PA: The New Era Printing Company, 1912), 4.

31. Herbert R. Sass, *Hear Me*, 79.

32. Albert Fried. *Socialism in America: from the Shakers to the Third International; a documentary history*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 2.

33. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1915), 59.

34. "To The Working Men", *The Workingman's Advocate,* (October 31, 1829), 3.

35. W.J. Ghent, "The American Workman's 'Golden Age' ", in *The Forum*, Vol. 31 March, 1901-August, 1901, (New York: The Forum Publishing Company, 1901), 695.

what does Marx himself have to contribute? A Viennese church newspaper from 1857 offers some clarification, declaring that Marx: “freed communist theory from… the pathetic phrasing, the theological aftertaste, and… confusion of ideas that characterize the various sects… and… brought it, with iron consistency, into a scientific system… no longer based on enthusiasm… or even on feeling, but on national-economic principles… it is a pleasure to see how this lion of dialectics silences… [the blubberers] and barkers who run along in the wake of the spirit of the times.”[36]

Karl Marx praisefully wrote in 1850, “And now we come to America… [its West Coast] densely populated by people of all races, from Yankee to Chinaman, from Negro to Indian and Malay, from Creole and Mestizo to European. Rivers of Californian gold are pouring over America and the Asiatic coast of the Pacific Ocean, and dragging the most reluctant barbarian nations into world trade, into civilization.”[37] But in writing on the history of colonialism, Marx could also point out that this system of pillaging, murder, displacement and ransom on tribal heads takes “revenge on the descendants of pious pilgrim fathers, who had grown seditious… At English instigation and for English pay [Pilgrims] were tomahawked. The British parliament, proclaimed blood-hounds and scalping as “means that God and Nature had given into its hand.”[38] Gold of course being the most profitable choice between white & Red. The crimes of colonial expansion were both the “binding” and an anarchic cutting off of historical alternatives at the frontier, but what must also be inherited is an inexorable chronology and stratigraphy upon which to develop. After his capture and rendition to Fort Frederica on the Georgia coast, Priber predicted that “before this century is past, the Europeans will have a very small footing on this continent.”[39] In a sagacious sense, Priber was correct, though work in this direction remains.

Nevertheless, a ‘Loaf-Bread Baker’ in 1827 New York wondered how it was that in America “damned custom of European origin still holds her sway through prejudice. Through which again she assumes empire, in despite of the solemn truths on which the rights of man are based and fixed in and by our

36. “Life of a Communist”, *Wiener Kirchenzeitung*, Vol. 48, (June 16, 1857), 379.

37. Karl Marx, *Werke*, Bd. 7, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 220-221.

38. Karl Marx, *Werke*, Bd. 23, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 781.

39. Americus, “An account of Preber, a Jesuit Missionary”, *The Gentleman’s and London Magazine,* Vol. 29, (Dublin: John Exshaw, October, 1760), 543.

constitutions."[40] As a Pilgrim oligarchy arose, so too did a Pilgrim proletariat. And whether from a Shaking Quaker's perspective or from a more universalist secular vantage, Marx's own intellect developed in tandem with and at the magnitude of the 19th century political rise and industrialization of the United States. It is not for nothing then that the "dictatorship of the proletariat"[41] was first described in detail by Marx's friend J. Weydemeyer in an American publication in 1852: "[t]he rule of the proletariat has nothing in common with the rule of a Vandal-like barbarism; on the contrary, the proletariat is the only class which is in a position to step into the entire legacy of the bourgeoisie, since its own welfare depends on the continued development of this legacy."[42] An American legacy in either case. Therefore, the fact that Engels pointed out an "eingebornen Arbeitermassen"[43] emerged in America was not merely a description of where these workers were born, but highlighting a process of 'indigenization.' So the Party too had to become "out and out American"[44], rather than German or something else.

Decades prior, in the 1840s, it was not only the "noble savage" outlook, but as Underground Railroad guide and Black utopian abolitionist Henry Bibb described his former Cherokee master, another kind of "noble savage slaveowner" myth emerged as well. Bibb attempts to explain how indigenous slaveowners allow "slaves enough to eat, [t]hey have no overseers to whip nor drive them… but… as is often the case as otherwise… the slave gets the better of the fight, and even flogs his master…"[45] Whether such claims stand to scrutiny is less important, since as Bibb explains he had to steal a horse to flee to freedom, "if a white man had been captured by the Cherokee Indians and carried away from his family for life into slavery… who would not do the same thing…?"[46] Unexpectedly, Sam Houston too encountered the Cherokees and ran to them as a young man and was "made heartily welcome and adopted into the household of Oolooteka… Houston wore the Indian dress and gained a

---

40. Charles Sotheran, *Horace Greeley and Other Pioneers of American Socialism*, (New York: The Humboldt Publishing Co., 1892), 102.

41. Joseph Weydemeyer, "The dictatorship of the proletariat", *Labor History,* Vol. 3 Iss. 2, 1962: 214-217.

42. Weydemeyer, "The dictatorship of the proletariat", 216.

43. Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Friedrich A. Sorge, (April 29, 1886)", *Werke*, Bd. 36, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979), 478.

44. Friedrich Engels, *The condition of the working class in England in 1844* (New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1887), *v*.

45. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave,* (New York: published by Author, 1850), 152-153.

46. Bibb, *Narrative,* 163.

thorough command of the difficult Cherokee language"[47], these were to be lifelong allies of his. Houston claimed, "I might have hated the Indians if I had a soul no bigger than a shellbark"[48], his second wife being descended from the same Long Hair Clan that Ludovick Grant[49] had married into prior to describing Priber a century before. Both Henry Bibb and Sam Houston looked upon the Cherokee with a measure of reverence rather than mechanically mimicking or mocking them. On this point, Priber also wondered how he was jailed if "he was not accused of having done any ill to the English… his crime must consist in loving the [Cherokees.]"[50]

Lenin says "in *every* nation there are toiling and exploited masses… [and the] ideology of democracy and socialism… But *every* nation also possesses a bourgeois culture (and most nations a reactionary and clerical culture as well) in the form, not merely of "elements", but of the *dominant* culture"[51] The culture of the lynch mob. The culture of genocidal forced relocation and germ warfare. The culture of hegemonic military and soft power. Of slave auctions and corporate monopolization. Of police corruption, foreign occupation and regime-change wars. This is the 'dominant' culture of the reactionary bourgeoisie of every nation. But Lenin forewarned, "we take *from each* national culture *only* its democratic and socialist elements; we take them *only* and *absolutely* in opposition to the bourgeois culture and the bourgeois nationalism of *each* nation."[52] If, as described presently, the American working massses were wanting or needing to draw aspects from a shared national culture, Lenin's Soviet practice and experience has some instruction:

> *What if the complete hopelessness of the situation… offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilization in a different way from that of the West European countries? Has that altered the general line of development of world history? Has that altered the basic relations between the basic classes of all the countries that are being, or have been, drawn into the general course of world history?*[53]

---

47. George S. Bryan, *Sam Houston*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 7.
48. Bryan, *Sam Houston*, 8.
49. Rennard Strickland, "Christian Gotelieb Priber: Utopian Precursor of the Cherokee Government", *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 48 Iss. 3, (Autumn 1970): 267 [footnote 17].
50. James Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, (London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), 241.
51. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 20*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 24.
52. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 20,* 24.
53. V.I. Lenin. *Collected Works Vol. 33*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 478.

Engels perhaps makes this seem easy in saying "[f]rom America to Russia is but a step"[54], but the framing of the US Constitution saw similar questions raised as well. If abolitionists like James Otis Jr. and Benjamin Rush and John Adams were able to endorse such a document, Engels could at once announce the US Constitution as "the first to recognize the rights of man" and also see that it "in the same breath confirms the slavery of the coloured races… in America: class privileges are proscribed, race privileges sanctified."[55] Here it is instructive to also apply Engels' observation that within the boundaries of our own historical social landscape, there can be "rediscovered in America… the materialist conception of history"[56], way down in the fractious tumult and ancient bedrock of the People themselves. This cannot but well up and clarify these "dominant" aspects of American chauvinist bourgeois culture, but how long might this 'negative' side be tarried within? It is for America's dead to bury their dead, "[b]ut no one knows America who does not know that the heart of her people beats true… [c]ommon-sense should forbid us and our critics from pressing what is really a terrible accusation—as if a whole nation were composed of conscienceless scoundrels."[57]

For Cornell Professor Martin Sampson writing in 1920, "[t]he past is but a fragment of universal history; so long is time that nations will disappear, undreamed-of nations arise."[58] A year prior, the American Black radical socialist magazine *The Messenger* was able to proclaim, "We want no black and white patriotism, which demands separate camps, separate ships, and separate oceans to travel on. What we really need is a patriotism of liberty, justice and joy. That is Bolshevik patriotism, and we want more of that brand in the United States."[59] Our nation was more than dreamt of, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries also, an agrarian socialist and populist movement began to take shape in America that again showed promise and left a vast field upon which work remained to be done. Moreover, Engels had written to a rural Texas comrade in 1893 explaining that one need not worry so pre-emptively about expunging all semblance of historical bourgeois symbolic and formal

54. Friedrich Engels. "Letter to Laura Lafargue, (November 24, 1886)", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 47, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 525.

55. Friedrich Engels. "Anti-Duhring, Part I: Philosophy", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 25, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 98.

56. Friedrich Engels, "Origin of the Family: Preface [To The First Edition]", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 26, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 131.

57. Martin W. Sampson, "A Problem of American Civilization", *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 28 Iss. 3, (July-September, 1920): 424..

58. Sampson, "A Problem of American Civilization", 437.

59. "We Want More Bolshevik Patriotism!", *The Messenger,* (May-June, 1919), 29.

"baggage" from the political body, since "the first objective of the labour movement is the conquest of political power for and by the working class."[60] So Farmer-labor politics could plainly recognize such a social question. "Is that socialism?" one American man asked, "Why, I have believed in that for years. I have often talked it over down at the store, and lots of folks around here think as I do about it."[61] But a quickly stultifying sort of general "common sense" must also be taken up, magnified, and sustained. A Party is needed in connecting this to dictatorship of the proletariat.

Pre-eminent early 20th century American Marxist Daniel De Leon once pointed out that, "[i]n all revolutionary movement… the thing depends upon the head of the column—upon that minority that is so intense in its convictions, so soundly based on its principles… that it carries the masses with it…[s]uch a head of the column must be our Socialist organization to the whole column of the American proletariat…. The head of whose column must consist of the intrepid socialist organization that has earned their love, their respect, their confidence."[62] Unfortunately for De Leon's otherwise apt description of an American proletarian vanguard party, in the same place, he compares Pizarro's conquest of the "empire of the Incas" to the army of the proletariat conquering Capitalism. Elsewhere he's more on target, "[i]t is in the hands of the socialists that the American Flag is in the keeping of… It is the socialists who are to-day bracing themselves against the attempt, and who will block the attempt to re-introduce despotism under the folds of the flag."[63] Such attempts do not merely come from outside either, since as Horace Greeley pointed out, "Comrades of Washington—Let us remember that, while the 'foreigners' Montgomery and Pulaski died… fighting for our freedom, while Lafayette, Hamilton, and Steuben proved nobly faithful… the traitor Arnold and the False ingrate Burr were sons of the soil" which could "only prove that virtue is bounded by no geographical limits, and treachery peculiar neither to the native nor the immigrant."[64]

---

60. Friedrich Engels, "Letter to F. Wiesen, (March 14 1893)", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 50, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 119.

61. James MacKaye, *Americanized Socialism: A Yankee View of Capitalism,* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), 5.

62. Daniel De Leon, *Reform or Revolution*, (New York: National Executive Committee, Socialist Labor Party, 1920), 22-23.

63. Daniel De Leon, *De Leon-Carmody Debate*, (New York: National Executive Committee, Socialist Labor Party, Fourth Edition, 1912), 40.

64. Horace Greeley, "Horace Greeley's Toast, Sent To a 'Know-Nothing' Banquet", in *The Life of Horace Greeley* by James Parton, (New York: Derby and Miller, 1868), 570.

Daniel De Leon as an immigrant himself and as Socialist Labor Party leader faced overwhelming odds and still kept doggedly along this path, "[i]t seems that there are people who by the word "revolution" understand a social wreck, a splitting off from the past absolutely. I do not so understand revolution… this revolution that we are about to make in our generation is intimately connected with the revolution that the so-called revolutionary fathers accomplished."[65] De Leon's son would later join the early CPUSA. But Standing Bear too spoke from a particular vantage about 'splitting off from the past', he describes mimicry and mockery, neither of which appear as ironic, "after having had my hair cut, a new thought came into my head. I felt that I was no more Indian, but would be an imitation of a white man. And we are still imitations of white men, and the white men are imitations of the Americans."[66] What face would American Communists hailing from all racial and national backgrounds have to put on other than an American one? After speaking of these 'revolutionary fathers', De Leon remarked: "Remember always Columbus's experience. Traveling westward to reach China, he never saw China, but something else spread itself between him and that country. Nevertheless, his principle was correct, and China was ultimately reached on that route. So may we, after we have accomplished our revolution, find something new, something that we know not about."[67]

Marx once said that development of consciousness involves stirring "it out of its dream about itself" and clarifying the "meaning of its own actions."[68] In general, there is no "white man's burden", precisely but not only because of the savagery of the nobleman. There is also no specifically "European civilizing mission" for socialism in America either, these are prolonged nightmares. Socialism and America are not dreams, and both are bound together by a vexing alchemical process of historical dissolution and becoming. For Hegel then, all the way from Europe, since America as both "the expression of a foreign Life" and "a land of the future"[69] carries a positive and multifarious weight in the present, such an encounter of the Other, as the encounter between East & West, is diverging and merging within America. This too offers clarification where

---

65. Daniel De Leon, "Proceedings of the Tenth National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party", (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1901), 94.

66. Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux.* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1928), 141.

67. Daniel De Leon, "Proceedings", 97.

68. Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 3, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 144.

69. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History.* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1861), 90.

Solberg argues "[t]he American mission in history was the restoration of humanity to its primitive glory."[70] Primitive here in the real sense of direct reproduction of community, and in the masterful sense of humanity naturalized.

> *Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,*
> *(But where is what I started for so long ago?*
> *And why is it yet unfound?)*[71] *– Walt Whitman*

[I]n the case of America—once the workers… know what they want, the state, the land, industry and everything else will be theirs.[72] – F. Engels

70. Winton U. Solberg, "Primitivism in the American Enlightenment," in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana and Chicago, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 62.

71. Walt Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*, (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860-61), 313.

72. Friedrich Engels. "Letter to Hermann Schluter, (January 1, 1895)", in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 50, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 401.

3

Henryk Grossman: The Best Defender of Marx and Capital

Ted Reese[1]

In that most notorious of years, 1929, a Polish Jewish Marxist called Henryk Grossman published *The Law of Accumulation and the Breakdown of the Capitalist System*. This vital work did the best job after the deaths of Karl Marx in 1883 and Freidrich Engels in 1895 of defending and clarifying the real, revolutionary content of Marx's *Capital*, which exposed capitalism as inherently crisis-prone and historically transient. With the leader of the reformist wing of European socialism, Karl Kautsky, having recently declared that "it is no longer possible to maintain that the capitalist mode of production prepares its own downfall" and in fact stood, in the wake of World War I, "stronger than ever", Grossman's book – published just a few months before the Wall Street Crash – anticipated a major crisis in the US that would ruin its European debtors.

---

1. Ted Reese is a British Marxist and author of *Socialism or Extinction*; *Abundant Material Wealth For All*, and *The End of Capitalism: The Thought of Henryk Grossman*.

While others viewed the soaring stock market as a sign of economic strength, Grossman knew this glorified ponzi scheme boom stood in for diminishing opportunities in profitable commodity production, where new (monetary/exchange) value is actually created. He was therefore able to identify a "massive" 'overaccumulation' of capital – a surplus glut of idle capital that had become unprofitable to invest – serving as a barrier to productivity growth and sustainable economic strength.

Despite having been proven right almost immediately by events on the New York Stock Exchange, *The Law of Accumulation* was met with almost universal hostility. Grossman upheld Marx's key finding that overaccumulated capital arose *inevitably* as a result of the internal contradictions of capitalist production *per se* – resulting in economic breakdown, or recession – and that this overaccumulation *tended to worsen* to a point that would eventually necessitate capitalism's supersession by socialism. In short, because profit equals growth and growth – or making more commodities in less time – equals devaluation, capitalists expand commodity production to increase the overall amount of profit, only to intensify the contradiction and tendentially push the *rate* of profit down. The average commodity contains less and less surplus value (gross profit minus the outlay on wages) and this manifests in an underproduction of surplus value relative to the existing amount of capital value that needs to be 'valorised' (reproduced and expanded) – an overaccumulation of capital. With the ongoing automation and AI revolutions, induced by capital's need to raise productivity, this core problem is naturally growing particularly acute. Capitalism is like a bodybuilder who after making rapid early gains in muscular hypertrophy then has to work harder and longer to see increasingly diminishing returns – while exhausting their energy supply at an accelerating rate.

Grossman was accused of dogmatism and quietism – he supposedly assumed socialism would replace capitalism 'automatically', without the self-liberating action of the working class. Grossman, however, was repeatedly explicit in stating that socialist revolution would not happen without the *conscious* action of the working class – *which therefore required a strong understanding of the capitalist socio-economic system and related historical tendencies*. He merely highlighted the underlying stimuli. His own revolutionary activity, for which he spent much time in prison and exile; his explicit support of the revolutionary praxis of Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemberg (if not the impreciseness of their economic theory); and his continued, outspoken support for the Soviet Union, despite its rejection of his work, suggests that he was far removed from any quietism.

Grossman's critics were mostly pseudo-Marxist social democrats who pursued, at least in word, a reformist (bourgeois electoral) road to socialism; yet, rather contrarily, promoted the theory that capital could accumulate harmoniously and indefinitely so long as it was managed correctly by the state – that recessions were preventable and not systemically inherent.

Such a view, of course, makes the case for socialism redundant – exposing their de facto pro-capitalist loyalties – for if capital accumulation does not break down of its own accord no imperative or indeed opportunity to replace it with a more stable mode of production could ever arise.

Today, Grossman stands even more vindicated. The US stock market is more overvalued than ever as investors try to skim money off each other instead maximizing the innovation and productivity growth that is actually physically possible. All forms of debt, largely a substitute for surplus value, stand at all-time highs; as does money stashed in corporate cash piles, money market funds and tax havens.

Capitalists and investors sit on this money like hens waiting to hatch their eggs while no convenient place for them to do so presents itself. While greed, warmongering and addiction to power are certainly habitual characteristics of capitalism's parasitic monopolists, emanating from the environment in which they were conditioned, the increasing shortage of profitable production arising from capitalism's own nature is the primary driver of falling living standards and the descent towards war and fascism.

Grossman's book remains extremely important – more vital than ever, given that capitalism is now even more senile – and yet it remains relatively unknown, even among most contemporary social democrats and communists. This problem should be regarded as a significant one for communists seeking to rehabilitate Marx, whose work remains largely discredited in a world that saw off the threat of global revolution in the 20th century and returned to being almost universally capitalist. Because Marx's epic tome has been so misrepresented and misinterpreted, *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown* – which, focusing on crisis theory in one volume, is shorter and easier to read (with entertaining polemical wit to boot) – serves as a grand defence of and exceptional primer to *Capital*, highlighting and elaborating Marx's most important findings at the same time as exposing the counter-revolutionary attacks and distortions that followed.

Marx's methodology

Grossman lamented "a whole generation" of Marxists – from both the reformist and revolutionary wings of the movement – because "no one has proposed … any clear ideas, about Marx's method of investigation". Instead, the focus had been on interpreting Marx's conclusions, which were "worthless divorced from an appreciation of the way in which they were established". Analyses had been based on "only secondary surface appearances that stem from the essence of capital accumulation as their primary basis".

Grossman subjected Marx's method to a reconstruction "for the first time", drawing out "the theory of breakdown" that "forms the cornerstone of the system of Marx":

> *To be sure, Marx himself referred only to the breakdown and not to the theory of breakdown, just as he did not write about a theory of value or a theory of wages, but only developed the laws of value and of wages. So if we are entitled to speak of a Marxist theory of value or wages, we have as much right to speak of Marx's theory of breakdown.*

Other theorists had either 'corrected' Marx's breakdown theory or insisted that he never proposed one. Capital's ability to accumulate harmoniously had been 'proven' theoretically by Austrian social democrat Otto Bauer in 1913. Using an abstract reproduction schema (mathematical pattern) of accumulating profit (and apportioning it to capital, wages, capitalists' consumption) similar to the ones employed by Marx – a simplified, 'pure' version of capitalism for the purpose of examining the essence of the system, with only capitalists and commodity-producing workers and no competition or foreign trade – Bauer claimed to have shown that capital could accumulate indefinitely in spite of a falling rate of profit.

Bauer, however, only worked through four cycles (or 'years'). Simply by continuing Bauer's schema, without any alterations, Grossman found that by the 36th year the process broke down since the amount of surplus value could no longer meet the postulated rate of accumulation – exposing the reformist's intellectual laziness. The schema would have broken down sooner if Bauer had started with a more realistic and higher ratio of capital to labour, which empirically tends to rise with innovation; but Grossman stuck with the figure in order to expose Bauer on Bauer's terms.

Alongside this surplus capital emerges surplus labor – the start of the schema assumes full employment – workers that capital can no longer afford to employ. To overcome overaccumulation, capitalists are compelled to reduce their outlay on wages, which eats into the profit available for accumulation and the consumption of capitalists. They are also compelled to innovate to raise labor's rate of productivity. More commodities must be made and sold in less time than before to devalue prohibitively expensive capital and generate enough extra profit to restore accumulation on a higher level. (The vitality of Grossman's theory is therefore clear when applied to today's environmental crisis – more of nature must be converted into commodities at an ever-faster rate.)

Grossman then does something that no other Marxist since Marx had done, and more thoroughly than Marx, in fact. He applies variations of the assumptions posited in the abstract schema – the constant value of wages and commodities, for example – and reintroduces, one by one, elements that had been initially omitted. Now competing capitalists and foreign trade are included, along with landlords and consumers. The schema is brought closer and closer to reality, testing the initial results as a means of verification. Do any of the variations or new factors help or hinder the breakdown tendency or suppress it altogether? Some things act as counter-tendencies that delay overaccumulation and breakdown, such as the relative or absolute reduction in wages (which are also naturally devalued with higher productivity) or the devaluation of capital; while others – ground rent paid to landlords eat into the profits of productive industrial capital, for example – have the opposite effect. Ultimately, Grossman finds that no counter-tendency suppresses overaccumulation for good. The devaluation that initially brings it down even snaps back in the opposite direction since each commodity now contains less profit.

All of the other theorists of the day, communist as well as social democrat, had taken their findings only from Marx's abstract schema instead of reintroducing the factors that made the schema more empirical – the scientific method of successive approximation. Without assessing these steps, incorrect conclusions were fatally drawn.

They therefore produced a variety of 'underconsumptionist' and 'disproportionality' theories of crisis that could be put down to 'external' rather than inherent factors, such as economic mismanagement. In the former, workers are not paid enough to buy all of the commodities they need, meaning profit goes unrealized. Reform and state regulation raising wages and welfare apparently solves the problem, though. In the latter, imbalances of commodities

and profits between different departments and branches of production, resulting in overproductions of goods that cannot be sold, demands centralized regulation, again making reform the answer.

A variation of underconsumption theory points to saturation of domestic consumption, making the solution the export of commodities and capital to 'non-capitalist' foreign markets – an option that, in the analysis of Rosa Luxemburg, becomes increasingly exhausted as the whole world becomes industrialized and capitalist. This version preserves an inherent breakdown tendency but shifts the crucial problem from the sphere of production to that of circulation or consumption, – as if capitalism actually produces too much value that therefore cannot be realised as profit, instead of too little.

While Grossman never denied that 'external' factors could trigger or catalyse a crisis, he showed that even without any such factors overaccumulation could not be avoided and that underconsumption, disproportionality, and overproduction were all *symptoms* of overaccumulation rather than primary drivers. If capitalists cannot invest, employment and wages must fall, explaining underconsumption, which in turn explains the overproduction of commodities that cannot be purchased – including by private businesses and corporations, which therefore end up with disproportionate stockpiles.

Grossman's findings make logical sense – the function of capitalism is to make a profit on investment and to accumulate capital in order to make more profit. A crisis therefore logically implies the disincentivization of investment and a crisis primarily of profitability, of *an underproduction of value and profit*.

Imperialism and war

Another thing Grossman deserves credit for is providing the clearest understanding of the imperatives behind imperialism and war, two of the most important counter-tendencies that prolong capitalism's ability to rejuvenate at a higher level.

Capital exports – investment in production overseas and high-interest loans – are increasingly needed to expand and cheapen the exploitable workforce; and, at the same time, to provide an outlet for surplus capital that cannot be reinvested profitably 'at home'.

Even Lenin's revered pamphlet *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* comes in for stick from Grossman. Although "he makes many acute observations", Lenin

> *linked [the tendency of stagnation and decay] to the growth of monopolies. That there is such a connection is indisputable, but a mere statement is not enough. One is not dealing simply with the phenomena of stagnation… Imperialism is characterised by both stagnation and aggressiveness. These tendencies have to be explained in their unity… In fact both phenomena are ultimately rooted in the tendency towards breakdown… The growth of monopolisation is a means of enhancing profitability by raising prices and, in this sense, is only a surface appearance whose inner structure is insufficient valorisation.*

Stalin's chief economic advisor Eugen Varga, whose theory was similar to Luxemburg's, denied the possibility of saturation of capital in any single country, simply saying that higher rates of exploitation were the attraction for capital exports. Grossman countered that, "[T]o suppose that capital can expand without limits is to suppose that surplus value can likewise expand without limits, and thus independently of the size of the working population. This [would mean] that surplus value does not depend on labour."

Because profit rates tend to average out across branches or departments of industry on the world market (a higher rate falls to the average rate once the attraction of investment saturates and competitors catch up in terms of innovation and organization), the commodities from the advanced country, with the higher level of technology, will be sold at prices of production higher than their value; and vice-versa. Much or even most of the value created in an underdeveloped country therefore goes towards the GDP of the one in which it is sold. Such transfers, which Grossman called 'unequal exchange' (a term that became more commonly used in the 1970s), "become a matter of life and death for capitalism" as overaccumulation reaches new heights. Hence the incessant aggression of 'foreign policy', especially by the US and Britain, the two age-old imperialist powers who therefore suffer from very high overaccumulations.

At the same time, competition on the world market over relatively dwindling profits intensifies – and with a rising number of countries reaching a state of overaccumulation – meaning the imperialist powers are increasingly drawn

towards violent conflict with each other over resources that should be controlled by the nations in which they reside. Hence today's emerging splits in NATO.

Kautsky claimed that absolute capitalist breakdown would be brought about by world war, which in his view would happen only because of 'uncivilised' ruling classes. On the other side of the same coin, Varga and the Bolshevik Nikolaĭ Bukharin believed WWII would bring about the completion of the world revolution. Grossman says:

> *It would be useless to search Bukharin for any other cause of the breakdown of capitalism than the ravages created by war…. If like Bukharin, we expect the breakdown of capitalism to flow from a second round of imperialist wars, then it is necessary to point out that wars are not peculiar to the imperialist stage of capitalism. They stem from the essence of capitalism as such, during all its stages, and have been a constant symptom of capital since its historical inception…. far from being a threat to capitalism, wars are a means of prolonging the existence of the capitalist system as a whole.*

Of course, war is a threat to capitalism in that it radicalises masses of people – and today capitalism doesn't stand much chance of surviving a nuclear war. But Grossman was at pains to show that Kautsky's was a subjective analysis and that the opposite was true: that massive overaccumulation brought about a systemic breakdown and world war followed necessarily not only because of competition but because it was the only way to sufficiently devalue capital and "create a breathing space" for accumulation to restart. War, because it is the ultimate means for devaluing capital and labor – and destroying the surplus of both – is therefore caused by and a temporary solution to the breakdown tendency. It was the destruction unleashed by World War II that ended the Great Depression and enabled the productivity boom that followed.

Revolutionary conclusions

Ultimately, Grossman finds that all of the counter-tendencies must eventually exhaust themselves – capital, commodities and money cannot be devalued lower than zero. In the final chapter of his book he draws his conclusions: the breakdown tendency continually compels capitalists to attack the wages and

living conditions of the working class – and eventually becomes so strong that the latter is *driven* to revolution:

> *If the largest and most important force of production, human labour power, is thus excluded from the fruits of civilised progress, it is at the same time demonstrated that we are approaching ever closer the situation which Marx and Engels already foresaw in the* Communist Manifesto*: 'the bourgeoisie is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slaves within their slavery'. This is also the reason why wage-slaves must necessarily rise against the system of wage-slavery.*

Grossman clearly stressed – and demonstrated – that working-class victories for higher wages and better conditions could deepen the capitalist crisis; or bring forward the next one or even its final demise. He also agreed with Lenin that no crisis could be considered the final one before the working class had seized and consolidated state power and implemented a publicly owned economy.

Liberated from private property and the profit necessity, Grossman argued, production could be organized and planned on a social basis as a purely technical labor process, without any concern for valorisation and thus without any inherent causes of economic crises.

Grossman was right

Although recognition of his work in the socialist bloc only ever came from East Germany, where he lectured after the war; and despite his frustrations with the Soviet leadership over its crisis theory and some of its tactical maneuvers – such as pursuing a Popular instead of United Front – Grossman never called for Stalin to be replaced and never withdrew his support for the Soviet Union. While contemporary Trotskyists tend to be more familiar with Grossman's work than other Marxists they also tend to criticise his 'Stalinism'. But Grossman defended the Soviet Union, having investigated it personally during a tour in the 1930s, on the basis that it was indeed socialist and in the context of immense imperialist aggression. He loudly warned the reformist and ultraleft wings of the movement that the defeat of the Soviet Union would represent an enormous setback for the global working class.

Nevertheless, Grossman's influence remains very limited. Efforts to defend Marx's crisis theory could have been strengthened if Grossman's book had been endorsed by the Soviet Union. The movement has yet to substantially address this issue and, ultimately following Lenin,[2] largely continues to promote a crisis theory of overproduction. Even though such a theory is usually framed as inherent to the rising ratio of capital to labor, it leaves wriggle room for reformism, for if overproduction is the problem, a reduction in production ('artificial scarcity') can be postulated as the solution – something private enterprise is likely to do anyway in order to raise prices as a way of centralising value. Overaccumulation theory centres the very essence of capitalist production and therefore locates the solution with absolute certainty. If capital is surplus, it must be socialised.

An abridged version of Grossman's book – which does not include any of the final chapter, where Grossman talks most about class struggle – published by Pluto Press in 1992, remained the only English translation of book until 2021.[3] Hopefully the full translation can help to strengthen today's burgeoning communist movement at a time when we find ourselves entering capitalism's deepest ever and – given how close we are to achieving 'fully' automated production – possibly final crisis.[4] Grossman's book has a large role to play in addressing such a tall order. Its inclusion in any communist party's education programme should be given serious consideration.

2. Vladimir Lenin, "Marx's Economic Doctrine", Marxists.org.

3. *Henryk Grossman Works, Volume 3: The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, *Being also a Theory of Crises*, Haymarket, translated by Rick Kuhn and Jairus Banaji. The paperback, released in 2022, while much cheaper than the hardback, is still regrettably pricey. Alternatively see Reese's book (Zero Books, 2022) for a summary of Grossman's most important theoretical and political contributions. See also Rick Kuhn, "Economic Crisis and Socialist Revolution: Henryk Grossman's Law of Accumulation, Its First Critics and His Responses", *Research in Political Economy* 21 (2004), Amsterdam, pp. 181-221; Kuhn, *Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism*, University of Illinois Press (2007), Illinois; and *Henryk Grossman Works vol I*, edited by Rick Kuhn, Brill, 2017. Kuhn's irritating Trotskyist interjections are to be ignored.

4. See Reese's article in *Red America* issue 5.

4

From Engels to Western "Marxism": The Eclipse of Dialectical Materialism

Giannetto Edoardo (Nanni) Marcenaro[1]

1. The Mutilation of Marxist Thought

In the panorama of that political philosophy in the West that has looked to the work of Karl Marx as a possible direction, or even guide, for the analysis and understanding of the economy and society in relation to the concrete relationships between the main political subjects and their transformation through organized and mass action, a tendency has long been manifested that it

---

1. Giannetto Edoardo Marcenaro, a.k.a Nanni is an Italian philosopher, independent researcher in philosophy and political economy, who finances his research by his own wage labor. He holds a degree in Philosophy of Science and is a member of the Centro Studio Nazionale "Domenico Losurdo", annexed to the Movimento per la Rinascita Comunista in Italy. He collaborates with several organizations and is author of some fifteen books (self-published), among which six (out of seven) volumes of a *General Description of Thought*, and a whole *General Commentary to □ριστοτέλης* in seven more volumes recently completed, besides a two-volume *Premise to the Critical Analysis of Political Economy,* title *Value and Knowledge*.

is not wrong to define as *destructive* and that has contributed not a little to the establishment of today's conditions, in which the grip of the capitalist ruling classes has slowly reduced the economies of Western countries to ultra-liberal systems in which no rights are truly guaranteed, and the working class lies inert, faced with the abuses that the masters of society carry out in their countries or abroad, as if stunned, in a *narcissistic impulse*, by the reflection of its own false freedom.

This trend finds its roots in a movement that we could define as historiographical, as well as philosophical, whose main consequence was the *marginalization* of the figure of Friedrich Engels from the intellectual and philosophical path of Karl Marx – in particular with regard to the crucial role played by the former in the development of dialectical materialism and the inestimable scientific function that this epistemological concept brings with it – by a broad theory of scholars and analysts, gathered by the academies in the current of thought coinciding with the so-called “Western Marxism”, which, as Domenico Losurdo shows in his homonymous 2017 book, completely glosses over *the colonial and national question*, completely disavowing Marxism-Leninism as dialectical materialism, and with it throwing science and reasoning out the window, while brazenly embracing the magical thinking of liberal ideology.

It was Engels in fact, in his project on “Dialectics of Nature”, who originally tried to give a precise intelligible order to this concept, before Lenin exposed, however succinctly, and never in a systematic way, its general principle and essential character, which was then further clarified by Mao Zedong in the first half of the 20th century.

It is possible to observe, in the wake of prof. Losurdo, how an evident connection exists between the positions taken, in particular by Engels, regarding the impossibility of avoiding the use of revolutionary violence to achieve the conquest of political power by the working class, and the legitimacy of the use of force, constituted as a State, in defending the result obtained, and the attempt made by the philosophers organic to the historical revisionism of “Western Marxism” to marginalize Engels from their lucubrations across the board, leveraging upon the political strategy to overthrow the bourgeois system, in which “revolutionary violence” is given a crucial role, supported in “The German Ideology”, but also in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” –that is, two four-handed texts written by Marx and Engels– to separate one from the

other, and to impute to Marx, either an *eschatological* vision of the historical process, or an *economistic* vision of the revolutionary dynamic.

By separating, with this crude expedient, Engels, the supporter of dialectical materialism, from a Marx reduced to the framework of historical materialism alone, both of these conceptions have in effect been mutilated, making ineffective and a refuge for empty formalisms devoid of any concreteness what was intended as the dialectic of openness to the transformations of social conditions, as “historical materialism”, and abandoning Engels’ positions without any hesitation. With this, Marx has also immediately been separated from Lenin, according to the movement of thought that has systematically characterized, as already said, Western Marxism: glossing over the national and colonial question, as well as branding any revolution conducted under the banner of Marxism-Leninism as marked by the cult of terror.

But just as dialectical materialism becomes *empty rhetoric* if it were separated, if it could, from the concrete aspect of the material realization of the historical process, in the same way historical materialism, if one dares to try to separate it from its complementary element, is reduced to nothing more than *taxonomy* and scholastic exercise of *erudition*, which when put to the test of facts turn out to be poorly put together deceptions.

2. Limits of Marx's labor theory of value and dialectical materialism

To contribute to the clarification of the issues outlined, we must first understand how Western “Marxism” is not a current of socialist thought, but a current of *liberal* thought that has fraudulently appropriated the terms of Marxism, corrupting them into an innocuous and adulterated version in which any revolutionary initiative becomes messianic expectation in the strength of the “movements”, in the presumed necessity of the “historical process”, and therefore dogmatic idealism that is configured as the “metaphysical materialism” of which Lenin carried out a corrosive refutation in his “Materialism and Empirio-Criticism”.

Western “Marxism” in fact rejects the *epistemological* theory of dialectical materialism, and with it Marxism-Leninism, and must therefore take refuge in a worldview in which the factors considered are always and in any case separate

elements whose interaction depends on a peculiar character that essentially divides them, so that the whole is reduced to a set of “atoms” isolated from each other whose relationship must be ascribed to a third element, *fabricated* by the mind, to which it attributes the connection between the various factors.

It should be emphasized with this that Western “Marxism” has not failed at all, and indeed, this cultural movement, promoted, financed, governed, and infiltrated by liberal subjects and anti-communist notions, has achieved exactly the objective it had set itself: to neutralize the Marxian theory of value, and make the vanishing point to which it looks *a utopian ideal* that, due to the very essence of humans according to the liberal vision, cannot be achieved.

Marx's theory itself, on the other hand, has many limits, and they must necessarily be recognized. From a strictly logical point of view, in fact, the argument with which he shows how surplus value is generated as a product of living labor that, in excess of what is necessary for the producer, is appropriated by the capitalist, in the terms in which it is placed in “Capital”, is only *apparent*, although his conclusion –that the capitalist *unduly* appropriates a part of the value that should be due to the worker– is true.

As Aristotle teaches, in fact, it is possible to construct an argument in which the structure of the procedure does not guarantee the connection between the two extremes and the middle, the element by which the reasoning is accomplished, and yet its conclusion is nevertheless correct: this depends on the nature of the premises adopted, which, for the argument to be effectively demonstrable, must be assertions, that is, statements already previously proven, that is, *demonstrated as correct*, in a broad sense “true” (for Aristotle, however, it is a question of “a-revelation”).

If in fact the new value produced is equivalent to the value of the means of subsistence, and this is what is paid to the worker, it is clear that, however much one may continue to work, one can never produce more than what is paid to him: the means of subsistence in fact, however necessary, provide energy sufficient for a whole day's work, and if the new value produced is equivalent to the value of these, it is what is transferred during this whole period, in which the energy supplied by those means of subsistence is consumed, and not a shred more can be seen.

Marx thus contented himself with *postulating* that labor power as a commodity is endowed with a “special property”, that of producing more than it consumes,

without however providing any reason, any element of proof, for this assertion. His argument can therefore *always* be refuted: it is not at all necessary, lacking *proof* of such a ”special property” and a rigorous *definition* of it, that the capitalist's profit derives from surplus value, and it remains possible that such profit is the result of a fraud, as the young Engels maintains in his short essay on the “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy”: the *arbitrary* sale of goods at a price higher than their value, the coverage of which is guaranteed by the issuance of money by the State. In order to exclude this option, Marx demonstrates, at the beginning of Capital, that in the exchange of goods, by means of an exchange-value or not, what occurs is a transaction between *equivalent values*.

This limit of the Marxian theory of contained labor-value depends first of all on the fact that Marx himself still falls almost entirely into the class of dogmatic thought, due to his own individual experience in central Europe in the 19th century: and this starting from historical materialism, which attributes to material conditions alone the determination of the structure of thought and cultural phenomena, thus excluding in an absolute and perfectly *arbitrary* way, the transcendental and existential aspect of the mind, which interacting productively with those material characteristics, in the form of aspects of a concrete contradiction, produce cultural phenomena and the development of the historical process. In this sense Marx, and also Engels, presuppose a behaviorist psychology, and forget in a completely risky way an essential part of the profound and fundamental epistemological lesson of Immanuel Kant, while maintaining its general structure, as they adopt the procedure of critical analysis (i.e. of transcendental philosophy), with the modality of the so-called “Hegelian” dialectic.

If we consider the question from the point of view of dialectical materialism, that is, from the point of view of the concept of unity in the conjunction of two contraries (not opposites, Lenin's definition which shows the residues of dogmatism in the latter's thought, since opposites exclude each other, and therefore must be separated, so that there could never be a synthesis, while contraries are complementary) we cannot be deceived and the question appears completely clear: in fact, if the means of subsistence are *value and use-value*, as they are (also according to Marx who nevertheless considers this fact irrelevant) then the value transferred to the labor force in their consumption as use-values –since the value is never consumed, but is always *transferred* in the same magnitude from one element to another– first of all reappears in that in the form of a mass of energy available to the organism to perform work.

Such energy is therefore, by definition, use-value, insofar as it will be consumed in the execution of living labor: it is consumed, it is not transferred, and therefore does not represent the *value* of the means of subsistence that has been transferred to the labor force in the organism. But as a use-value, this mass of energy must also be, dialectically, in relation to a value: *what does this value, that of the means of subsistence, concretely consist of?*

We know that value remains unchanged, and that it exists as a material object as a coagulation of human labor: therefore the value of the means of subsistence corresponds to the matter of those means, and that is, precisely to an element that is equivalent to constant capital, raw material, which, transformed in the process of digestion, is integrated, in the consumption of the use-value as a mass of energy, into the organism itself, and that is, makes the *growth* of the body and its *material consistency* possible. This matter then differs in quality first of all, as divergent chemical elements or molecules, organic compounds, which precisely bring this or that value to the organism, regardless of their quantity. The body is therefore transcendentally equivalent to accumulated value as constant capital, which is incessantly applied in the process of production and consumption of energy necessary for organic activity.

It follows therefore, in a perfectly consequent and necessary manner, that the value that is transferred from labor power to the commodity is not that of the means of subsistence, and that therefore *precisely in this factor* lies the essence and origin of that "special property", which allows it to produce more than it consumes. Furthermore, since it is such –it produces more than it consumes– then it means that it depends on an element for which it adds a *whole* for each unit of time in living labor, which instead represents only a *part* of the use-value of those means of subsistence, that is, only the part of a whole.

It is then evident that, since the final result of the production process will be a value and a use-value – and the latter is not that of raw materials, nor that of the mass of energy certainly – it follows that this too, the use-value concretely realized as a value, coagulation of living labor, is provided by that part of the labor force in which the value transferred to the product resides: this part then we call "valorized" or "valorizable" labor force, while the other, in which the value and use-value of the means of subsistence reside will be "organic" or "simple" labor force, where the two, again and always dialectically, are *coincident*, although *distinct*.

If the latter then strictly concerns the *quantitative* component of the labor force, the former instead is its aspect that represents the *qualitative* component of the

labor force, coagulation of human knowledge, where the latter is worth as constant capital, and the former instead as variable capital, as organic components of the labor force as a “commodity”.

This is the way of thinking according to the appropriate criterion of the analysis of any phenomenon, that is, *all* phenomena, or the concept of dialectical materialism: *therefore*, of this criterion we have an absolute certainty, as the one that represents transcendentally, that is, to the intellect, *the complete dynamics of the development of phenomena*.

3. Dogmatic character of Western thought and phenomena as material contradiction

It should also be emphasized how, especially in the West, Hegel's work and his influence on Marx are seriously overvalued: Hegel's thought, concretely, is nothing more than an immense apparent reasoning, and his much celebrated “dialectic” is only an idealist distortion of the “διαλεκτικὴ” procedure that was exposed by Aristotle, which last consists *exactly* in the following: starting from a notion of general, drawn from experience, empirically –essentially by similarity of distinct cases, and that is according to a *statistical* procedure– a notion that is the understanding of a certain element in the form of a concept, that is, a transcendental object, expressed as a definition in which the parts of that concept are distinct, it is possible, following the correct procedure of reasoning –that is, not towards the superior genus as Plato does, and so also Hegel– to obtain knowledge regarding all the forms underlying that notion of general.

This is accomplished on the one hand by deducing the parts from the whole, that is, by alternating “contrary” terms –as he calls both the “forms” in relation to each other, and these in relation to the “genus”– in the placement of a “known-fact” as a minor premise, that is, acknowledged by the person evaluating the argument, and therefore demonstrated, equally to the notion of general from which one starts, and on the other hand, without introducing whatever “element” unrelated, “external”, to the fact, by offering material proof of one’s argument, which demonstrates its correctness, as must happen in a court of law.

It is not permitted in any case to postulate premises of which one is not already certain, since by “hypothesis” it is not possible to know anything new: it is only

possible *to confirm* something of which one already knows –something that is implied in the elements available to one's evaluation– that is, by building a structure of relations between those elements that are relevant to the fact, and by identifying the middle, concrete, sensitive term, adequate to act as a probative element of one's argument. For Aristotle, in fact, all knowledge starts from empirical experience, and must return to it to provide proof of the correctness of such knowledge.

Thus Hegel turns Aristotle's dialectic upside down, while Marx brings it back down to earth, as suggested by the words he uses in the "Preface" to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy". It is in fact possible to demonstrate how Aristotle was *the first dialectical materialist thinker* in the West, although his thought, having to adapt to the deeply dogmatic character of his cultural traditions, has not been fully understood in its most characteristic essence until recent years, in the "General Commentary" to his "Corpus", recently completed in his seventh and last volume by who's writing. It is perhaps no coincidence that Marx, precisely in Capital, quotes the acute Greek man several times, and pays particular attention to precisely these elements, the "middle terms".

There are also some quotes from Lenin's "Conspectus of Aristotle's book *Metaphysics*" of 1915, and "Statistics and Sociology" of 1917 that supports this perspective very convincingly even from the point of view of the great revolutionary leader himself: in the latter short work he indeed begins by describing with great clarity and succinctly exactly the position, we just briefly recalled, that the acute Greek man rested upon regarding the proper treatment to give of determined empirical contents in the investigation of concrete phenomenal situations, and Lenin presents such approach as the one that alone can provide reliable and and justified conclusions about the issues at hand[2]

---

2. Vladimir Ilic Lenin, *Statistics and sociology,* Lenin Internet Archive, 2002 (2005): https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/00d.htm. The quotation is the following, emphases mine: «Precise facts, *indisputable facts* […] are especially necessary if we want to form a proper understanding of this complicated, difficult and often deliberately confused question. But how to gather the facts? *How to establish their connection and interdependence?* The most widely used, and most fallacious, method in the realm of social phenomena is to tear out individual minor facts and juggle with examples. Selecting chance examples presents no difficulty at all, but is of no value, or of purely negative value, for in each individual case everything hinges on the historically concrete situation. Facts, if we take them in their entirety, in their interconnection, are not only stubborn things, but undoubtedly *proof-bearing* things. […] [W]e must seek to build a reliable foundation of precise and indisputable facts that can be confronted to any of the "general" or "example-based" arguments […]. And if it is to be a real foundation, we must take not individual facts, but the sum total of facts, *without a single exception*, [i.e. necessarily] relating to the question under discussion. Otherwise there

while in the former, although grappling with the extremely thick and multilayered levels of Aristotle's reasoning and trying to combat it by somewhat smearing it as anti-dialectical, he must after all admit that «[h]ere we have the point of view of dialectical materialism», even though he maintains as yet incorrectly that Aristotle gets to that point of view «accidentally, not consistently, not elaborated, in passing»[3].

Indeed the Greek's position is exactly that the "phenomenon", what appears as empirical object, is a "unit", "μονάς", whose very existence as "unit" depends on the indissoluble conjunction between two "contrary" elements, "form", "ε□δος", and "matter", "□λὴ", whose coincidence and interaction as "contraries" is the very principle of its own appearance as "phenomenon": in the "ε□ναι", "being" (as in "accomplished-act-of-existing") of any one "phenomenon" there lies an "□ναντὶα", a "contrariness", and what happens is indeed the transformation of some "substrate" from one "contrary" to the other. It must surely be said to Lenin's defense that the versions he had available couldn't but be afflicted by the endemic platonic mystification in the reading of Aristotle's works, who suffered for long centuries from a deep distortion due to the conceptual purification of extremes driven by the idealist mindset produced by dogmatic thought, apparent in the haphazard and rhapsodical translation of very precise terms, arranged in tightly knit extended series of interlocked reasonings whose logical solution requires to respect the order of placement in the procedure, and whose demonstration holds for each of them in connection with all other preceding and following reasonings, as a living organism existing all at once.

Even Marx, after all, due to the historical context of his existence, is not able to abandon the dogmatic, that is, essentially, Western, way of thinking: with the "value" that is "absolutely" separated from the "use-value", so that the latter can be set aside as irrelevant to the production process, and all the determining relations be reduced to a distinct magnitude, just as for example Gyorgy Lukacs with his "social being", to quote one of the most renowned Western "Marxist" philosophers, he still falls entirely back into dogmatism.

---

will be the inevitable, and fully justified, suspicion that the facts were selected or compiled arbitrarily, that instead of historical phenomena being presented in *objective interconnection and interdependence* and treated as a *whole*, we are presenting a "subjective" concoction to justify what might prove to be a dirty business.» This whole paragraph shows indeed astounding similarity to the arguments made by □ριστοτέλης himself in his treaty about rhetoric.

3. Vladimir Ilic Lenin, *Conspectus to Aristotle's book* Metaphysics, Lenin Internet Archive, 2008: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/misc/x12.htm.

The latter after all is a structural characteristic of Western culture that in order to be overcome requires the *synthesis* of the two historically dominant traditions of thought in the world, the Eastern one and precisely the Western one: which precisely is dialectical materialism, as a transcendental philosophy conducted through critical analysis. However, there remained the task, which Lenin had no way, possibility, opportunity to accomplish, of offering a demonstrative exposition of this concept in its productive application, that is, of new epistemological value, to the understanding and analysis of the phenomena themselves.

What reason, however, makes dogmatism structural to Western thought? The answer is very simple: the character of Western culture, in fact, that is the measure of its understanding of phenomena, can be expressed in formal terms in the relation, "$+x \neq -x$": a relation where two distinct elements *cannot at all* be coincident, and are therefore opposed and necessarily separate. This is a premise that is necessarily valid, insofar as it results from the understanding of a manifest quality in Western cultural productions: it is an empirical premise, resulting from the critical analysis of the determining conceptual relations detected in concrete material expressions, in the historical intellectual production of the culture that we know by the name of "the West".

Granted this measure, however, this does not change the fact that each of those "x" is a phenomenon, insofar as it is known, and therefore conceptually, that is structurally, the two coincide, while apparently remaining distinct from each other. Western thought, however, by its very nature, cannot conceive of two coinciding elements as being at the same time distinct: therefore it must attribute what they coincide in to a third element, of which however *there is no evidence*, and which always appears as a Platonic "third man" that leads to a regressum ad infinitum, or to a reductio ad absurdum, in the development of which the refutation of one or the other hypothesis occurs: from this proceeds the alternation of the terms of the dogmatic understanding of the dialectical dynamics of phenomena in the historical process.

In fact, since the concept of unity in the conjunction of opposites is equivalent to the understanding of the dynamics of phenomena in general and everything that can be known is nothing other than phenomena –including the set we consider the whole, that is, the Universe– in their contradictory conjunction with the organic structures, organized by species, which they share as a qualitative component that determines them as "this" or as "that", it necessarily follows that the concept of dialectical materialism coincides with the only real

transcendental object, that is, *the only existing concept* as an understanding of the general form of the phenomenon *as a phenomenon*, and which, as such, is the primary origin of the entire development of the historical process: it itself, as the same, presents itself in forms radically distinct from one another, which, adopting alternative but equivalent terms for the definition of the relevant elements and relations, constitute *the history of thought*, as the development of the contradiction between the concept of dialectical materialism and the dogmatic understanding of phenomena, according to that certain measure.

Yes, because even in the East such understanding remains dogmatic, of course, since phenomena are *immediately* received as elements distinct from one another, which the mind therefore assumes to be separate: however, the measure of understanding in Eastern culture is the antithetical one to Western culture, and that is, it is formally represented by the relation "+x = –x", a relation in which the two elements in the distinction coincide, and which historically, *concretely*, has manifested itself in the concept of "dao", that is, the concept, transcendentally extracted from the dogmatic shells of religious traditions, of a "cosmological" unity, fundamental and unconditional, indissolubly constituted by two elements contrary to one another, whose coincidence one within the other is the principle of their changing phenomenal appearance.

This is *precisely* the concept of dialectical materialism, which provides an empirically grounded reason for the fact that Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism have been fully and clearly understood precisely in China, the birthplace of the concept of "dao," and in general in the East –a part of the world where that concept has exercised a strong influence, often through Buddhism– while they have been misunderstood, intentionally or not, and vigorously rejected by the entire horizon of "communist" intellectuals in the West.

So, from a dialectical point of view, just as there is no "value" in the sense in which Marx meant it, neither does any "being" exist: the latter is nothing but a thought, a "universal" in fact, nothing concrete or material, but on the one hand this element is always and in any case placed in an absolutely opposed way to "non-being" and cannot but be absolutely separated from it, dogmatically, and on the other hand it is not possible to offer any type of concrete, material example of "being" as "being", "social" or not.

A "being" in fact must necessarily be conceived as an element to which a limit is placed as a unit, as an individual, but in this last form any class of

phenomena has peculiar characteristics that distinguish it from the others, and therefore no such element can be admitted as what all of them have in common. If that which offers its "being" to each of them were in turn a "being" that would be "the being" and therefore *they should all be the same,* while, although on the one hand they coincide, on the other they are clearly distinct.

To speak of "being" is equivalent to speaking of a "nothing", and it is perhaps no coincidence that Heidegger, more than twenty centuries after Aristotle, concluded that the "way-of-being" most "proper" of "being-there" is "existential nothingness", that is, the "anticipation-of-death", that is, "not-being-there": when one "is" one therefore lives in an "inauthentic" way by definition, unless one lives as if one were dead! It cannot be surprising that according to the eminent German intellectual the fundamental sensation in human life was anguish. However, he too is desperately confused in the useless attempt to produce a coherent account of the concept of dialectical materialism from a dogmatic point of view, an undertaking that, *by definition*, can only result in complete failure.

In fact, speaking of "being" –the Greek term that Aristotle himself uses is a verbal voice, conjugated with the present participle, which counts as a verbal adjective, and therefore means rather "what-presently-is", and not "being" as the deplorable modern editions are accustomed to rendering it– and of other presumed elements of whose actual existence there is no evidence, that is, the "universals", is completely meaningless, since it hypothesizes material elements whose existence is purely transcendental, that is, they are simple deduced notions assumed in the absence of proof, and postulated as existing *outside the mind that thinks of them* as overwhelming factors that dominate the dynamics of phenomena.

Thus, when in the framework of dialectical materialism we say "value" we are not at all meaning a "value" in a broad sense, in "general", as an element to be considered separate as "universal", a "value-as-such", but we *always* mean the real magnitude of a *concrete* phenomenon, whose material characteristics are inextricably linked to its complementary, that is, dialectical, or else *contradictory*, forms, so that this phenomenon exists simultaneously as value and use-value, and the same naturally applies to the other notion briefly examined here, "being", whatever its hypothetical species may be.

What is erroneously understood with the term "being" in fact, that is, an individual object existing materially in certain sensible magnitudes,

dialectically, must first of all be called an "*organism*", and the latter depends for its existence on the execution of specific procedures that maintain its shape or increase it. *The latter are "known facts".* The "organism" is therefore an individual object which nevertheless assumes its appearance of unity by virtue of a structure according to which those procedures are carried out: it is therefore not a "being", but a "*structured process"*, that is to say a material event which can occur only and exclusively under certain determined conditions in a very precise concrete situation, in which a set of distinct elements is arranged according to a certain order in accordance with a specific measure for each class of "organisms" (what is true for "value" and "being" is also true for "nature", which is another materialist concept, yes, but metaphysical).

It is therefore, in accordance with the concept of dialectical materialism, a *material contradiction*, as multiplicity that appears as unity. It follows naturally, as Eastern thought itself has been affirming for millennia, that the so-called "I" is nothing other than a thought with which the mind, *deceiving itself*, identifies itself, thus separating itself transcendentally from everything that does not coincide with this "I" thought, whereas it is the mind itself that guarantees that individuality, as an antithetical expression –that is, as an undulatory aspect of organic existence, whose concrete reality as a "morphological field" has been demonstrated by numerous experiments– complementary, once again in a way that conforms to our concept, to the corpuscular one that exists as a process and appears to the senses as a body.

Those who are unable to see all this have not yet developed a dialectical vision of phenomena, and that is, have not yet overcome the "state of minority" that Kant spoke of and that Aristotle called "youthful character".

4. Self-criticism: an unavoidable philosophical task of communists

As communists, that is, Marxist-Leninists, therefore, it is necessary to master the concept of dialectical materialism as completely as possible, because, being the appropriate criterion for analyzing phenomena, if one abandons it, any analysis that one might venture about will certainly be wrong, and therefore relying on them can only lead to suffering one defeat after another: the present condition of the communist movement in the West, which has abandoned dialectical materialism for a liberal current of anarchist thought as evanescent

as the passions of adolescents, inexorably attests to the incontestable correctness of this conclusion.

Such inevitable defeat does not *at all* mean that the opponents had adopted that appropriate criterion, but it simply means that, if one's arguments are reduced to *unprovable* hypotheses whose *credibility* must be guaranteed by a constituted authority, whoever manages to gain the upper hand over the opponent in the dispute depends only on the mass of opinions that support one or the other hypothesis, and therefore on the quantity of individuals that can be reached by those opinions: it is therefore natural that in the Western production system, where the means of information and education are under the control of the capitalist ruling class, it was the latter that overwhelmed with its immense enchanting power the feeble and poorly determined voices against it, convincing hundreds of millions of people thanks to the annual investment of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Could it be surprising then that in the East, where the communists never abandoned dialectical materialism, and where it was even further developed, the Marxist-Leninists were not only not defeated, but instead achieved resounding successes, making *the world anti-colonialist revolution* advance in an imposing and decisive way, thanks to the decisive and formidable development of the productive forces in the People's Republic of China?

The first task of a communist therefore, as is well known, is *self-criticism*: and self-criticism is precisely the complete and detailed analysis of one's own way of thinking, of one's own vision of the world. Each communist is therefore required to ask himself with seriousness, courage, and determination: *does my understanding of phenomena conform to the criterion of dialectical materialism?*

That is: am I able to understand each of the phenomena that manifest themselves in reality, concretely, as a structured process, a conjunction in an indissoluble unity of two opposing dynamics whose very coincidence constitutes the essential fulcrum of its development and existence? And so, am I able to understand each of the phenomena as a complementary part of the set of phenomena in their totality, as organic elements thought of as integrated into my vision of the world, principal or secondary aspects, of secondary contradictions of the *principal* contradiction in *reality*, that between the conditioned and the unconditioned?

5

A Comprehensive Look at the Dialectical Materialist Worldview

Carlos L. Garrido[1]

Introduction

It should be clear to the critical observer that we exist in a nodal point in universal history. The bourgeois fixation of the 'end of history' thesis has itself ended. American imperialist unipolarity is on the precipice of Mephisto's dictum, "all that comes to be deserves to perish wretchedly."[2] In the world beyond that 14% of the global population whose leaders fancy themselves as the 'international community,' the rise of multipolarity means sovereignty,

---

1. Carlos L. Garrido is a Cuban American philosophy professor. He is the Director of the Midwestern Marx Institute and the Secretary of Education of the American Communist Party. He has authored many books, including *The Purity Fetish and the Crisis of Western Marxism (2023)*, *Why We Need American Marxism (2024)*, *Marxism and the Dialectical Materialist Worldview (2022)*, and the forthcoming *On Losurdo's Western Marxism (2025)* and *Hegel, Marxism, and Dialectics (2025)*. He has written for dozens of scholarly and popular publications around the world and runs various live-broadcast shows for the Midwestern Marx Institute YouTube. Subscribe to his Substack: *Philosophy in Crisis*.

2. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 161.

freedom, win-win relations in international trade, de-militarization, etc. In the Western capitalist world, the sentiment is the opposite. Here crisis has become the norm, and, as Gramsci once said, it "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born."[3] In this "interregnum," the "morbid symptoms" of Boris Johnson, Trump, Biden, Bolsonaro, Le Pen, et. al. arise.[4] These symptoms cannot be known – as is often done by liberals and the pundits of the political-economy that got us here – separated from the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the decay and delegitimation of American/NATO imperialism. To know the current state of our world concretely, and hence, to ascertain the conditions for a revolutionary way forward, a dialectical materialist outlook, capable of knowing the world comprehensively, in its development and interconnections, is needed.

Why Weltanschauung?

In his posthumously published *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels describes dialectics in the following manner:

Dialectics, so-called objective dialectics, prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature.[5]

Any discussion on Marxist dialectics must start, if one wishes to avoid confusion and retain scientific rigor, with a formal distinction between objective and subjective dialectics. Without subjective dialectics objective dialectics would not be known, and, without objective dialectics the materialist character of the Marxist dialectic would be lost – it would be an idealist dialectic, concerned only with the dialectic in thought. Dialectics *en toto,* then, pertains to two fields: an ontology and an epistemology. Objective dialectics refers to the ontological field, and subjective dialectics to the epistemological field. The concept of dialectics refers both to claims about the constitution of

3. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 2014), 276.

4. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks,* 276.

5. Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* (London: Wellred Books, 2012), 214.

the world – which includes nature, society, and thought – and about the methodology through which one can best come to know the world concretely.[6]

To be clear, these two fields, namely, objective (ontological) and subjective (epistemological) dialectics, are not separated in human practice. In human activity the objectively dialectical character of the world is what allows for our subjective dialectical reflection of it into our minds; and further, this subjective reflection of objective dialectics reciprocally informs and sharpens our ability to interact with the world. It does not do so, however, by cementing itself as an a priori dogma we 'apply' to the world. Instead, As Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins argue, it functions as a set of 'reminders' to prevent "dogmatism and narrowness of thought."[7] Dialectical materialist analysis urges us to

'Remember that history may leave an important trace… Remember that conditions change and that the conditions necessary to the initiation of some process may be destroyed by the process itself. Remember to pay attention to real objects in space and time and not lose them utterly in idealized abstractions. Remember that qualitative effects of context and interaction may be lost when phenomena are isolated.' And above all else, 'Remember that all the other caveats are only reminders and warning signs whose application to different circumstances of the real world is contingent."[8]

This necessary distinction between objective and subjective dialectics is not an artificial bifurcation, but a theoretical one aimed at allowing us to center in and focus on the two primary fields (or aspects) of dialectics *en toto*. If subjective dialectics has emerged in human consciousness (a consequence of a long and arduous attempt to know the world concretely in the trajectory of universal history), then the interactions humans have in the world (i.e., through praxis) will be marked by the inseparability of objective and subjective dialectics. It is in this sense in which we can understand what V. I. Lenin means when he says that "logic, dialectics, and the theory of knowledge of materialism" all stand for the same thing, and hence, the "three words are not needed."[9] As Evald Ilyenkov clarifies in *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism,* dialectical materialism holds " 'ontology' is just as inseparably connected with

---

6. Considering 'thought' is under the category 'world,' this means that the methodology of coming to know the world is also the methodology through which we come to know ourselves.

7. Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 191.

8. Levins and Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist,* 191-192.

9. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 317.

'epistemology', as the categories expressing the dialectical nature of truth are connected with objective dialectics."[10] It is this connection of ontology and epistemology which Lenin expresses above.

Why, then, shall we understand them as two distinct, albeit united, fields? Is Lenin right in saying 'three words are not needed'? I think that although Lenin, as Ilyenkov shows, is right about the connection of a dialectical materialist ontology and epistemology, it is nonetheless worth keeping each 'word' separated, for they depict different 'aspects' or 'fields' of the dialectical materialist *weltanschauung* (worldview). If one is already conscious of the unity of the aspects in the real world, the ability to focus in on one aspect of a thing can help enhance the understanding of the whole. This is not a full-scale reification, but the recognition that placing the microscope on one aspect can enhance the comprehensive view of the whole.

For instance, in evolutionary theory the poles of Lamarckian transformationism and Darwinian variationism – the former which sees an organism as subject of its own evolution, the latter which sees it as the object of "autonomous and alienated" internal and external forces – is overcome by the Marxist position which holds that an organism and its environment are in a "dialectical relationship," where "both are at the same time subjects and objects of the historical process."[11] The fact that an organism is in practice the subject-object of its own evolution does not remove our ability to emphasize one aspect over the other in an investigation, and when this dialectical relationship is kept in mind, the partial reification of an aspect helps enrichen our understanding of its particularities and hence, of the dialectical interaction of the whole. By focusing on the active or subject aspect of an organism you simultaneously enrichen your understanding of it as object, for the environment which the subject aspect transforms retroactively transforms it, making it into its object. As Levins and Lewontin put it, "the organism influences its own evolution, by being both the object of natural selection and the creator of the conditions of that selection."[12] Engels had already noted this in his attacks on Draper and other scientists, namely, they treat the question "as if nature exclusively reacts on man, and natural conditions everywhere exclusively determined his

10. Evald Ilyenkov, "Dialectics - The logic of Revolution, Philosophy, and Natural Science," In *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* (New Park Publications, 1982): Retrieved from Marxist Internet Archives: https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/positive/index.htm

11. Levins and Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist*, 87, 4.

12. Levins and Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist*, 106.

historical development," this view, he argued, is "one-sided and forgets that man also reacts on nature, *changing it and creating new conditions of existence for himself*."[13] There exists a reciprocal relationship between the two, in each making the other they simultaneously create the condition for the other to make them. Just like we can focus our reflection on the subject or object aspects of an organism separately while understanding their necessary unity in practice – and further, base their separation on an awareness that doing so under certain circumstances will enrichen our understanding of their unity – we can similarly highlight the objective and subjective aspects of dialectics without falling into the reified bifurcation of the 'old materialism' or of 'old metaphysics' which Marx had already overcame in his "11 thesis on Feuerbach" with the Hegelian notion of practice.

It is important to note here the usage of *weltanschauung* to describe Marxism. I am sure its utterance brings about a certain uneasiness in the contemporary Marxist scholar in the West. Like a veteran of war, the Marxist scholar in the West trembles as traumatic memories of second international economistic and deterministic Marxisms rush at the mere utterance of Marxism as a *weltanschauung*. Perhaps these fears are correct, the opportunists, social patriots, and renegades of the second international vulgarized Marxism to unrecognizable extents.

However, their real shivers are not rooted in the second international 'Marxism,' but in the Marxism which actually succeeded in attaining political power and establishing the first socialist state. Regardless of the struggle this Marxism had against the perversions of the second international, Marxist scholars in the West generally share the sentiment of Michael Heinrich, namely, that "a continuation and further simplification of *worldview Marxism* took place within the framework of 'Marxism-Leninism.' "[14] Even further, some argue that the end of Marxism-Leninism (symbolized to them by the fall of Soviet socialism) finally created the conditions for reading Marx anew, free from the bondage of Soviet orthodoxy. Critiques such as these have become a theoretical *hyun-gwan*[15] for Marxists in the West; every book's preface contains the same ritual critique of so-called 'Soviet Marxism.' To them it does not matter that, as I have argued before, "such homogeneity never existed, plurality and debate

13. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 234.

14. Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 25.

15. This is the Korean tradition of taking off your shoes before you step into a house.

were always present."[16] It is much easier to grab on to the low hanging fruit of Stalin's "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" and homogenize the thought of a whole population from there. It doesn't matter that "during the communist era, three of every five books in the world were produced in the Soviet Union."[17] Somehow – and these are the folks criticizing the soviet Marxists for 'dogmatism and simplistic thinking' – the country which produced 60% of the world's books with 6% of the population all managed to affect the most uniform thinking in their theorists, such that only one form of Marxism existed – 'Soviet Marxism.' This is the nonsense which has plagued the Marxism of the West and hindered theoretical development.[18] Only as of recent has it become more acceptable to look back at the wealth of Marxist theory (most of which is still unfortunately untranslated) produced out of the soviet experiment. Specifically, this has taken shape through three central periods of examination: 1) the work grounded in Lenin's philosophy, 2) the late 1920s/early 1930s studies in dialectical materialism (e.g., Kuschin (1929), Rubin (1928), Deborin (1930), Rozental (1933), Rozenblum (1933), etc.), and 3) the post-1955 tradition of 'creative Marxism' that emerged out of Lomonosov Moscow State University (e.g., Zinov'ev (1960), Ilyenkov (1960), Tipukhin (1961), Orudzhev (1964), Mankovsky (1962), Vaziulin (1968), etc.).[19]

It is essential to mention the reaction against what is labeled 'Soviet Marxism' because here we find one of the central reasons behind Western Marxist's rejection of a Marxist *weltanschauung*. For them worldview Marxism is synecdochally understood to be equivalent to the Marxism of the Soviet Manuals (in the manuals it is called 'World Outlook').[20] Regardless of the fact that manuals were meant for popular dissemination, and hence, intentionally simplified, Western Marxists treat such manuals as the authoritative word of a Marxist *weltanschauung*. They forget that, as Lenin said, "human knowledge

16. Carlos L. Garrido, " 'Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature', by: Kaan Kangal," *Monthly Review Online* (February 13, 2022).

17. Michael Parenti, *Blackshirts and Reds: Rational Fascism and the Overthrow of Communism*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1997), 113.

18. In my work I have theorized this as a 'purity fetish'.

19. For more on this see: Kaan Kangal's *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature* (2020), Roland Boer's *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* (2021), and Manolis Dafermos' article in *Capital and Class* "Rethinking the relationship between Marx's Capital and Hegel's Science of Logic: The tradition of creative Soviet Marxism" (2021).

20. The two most famous ones are *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism: Manual* (1961) which included a collection of scholars, party officials and publicists (the most famous scholar here is Lev Vygotsky, whose status as a communist, developmental psychologists in the West have tried very hard to whitewash – Curry Malott, "Vygotsky's Revolutionary Educational Psychology," *Liberation School* (March 9, 2019)), and the Konstantinov edition of *The Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1979).

develops from ignorance," and hence, a more concrete-complex Marxist *weltanschauung* can only be understood on the grounds that it is built up from the deficiencies of its elementary or base presentations.[21] This was the aim of the manuals, to create such 'base' knowledge in the masses of people, it wasn't supposed to be the most theoretically rich exposition of the Marxist *weltanschauung*, but the one the masses could understand and educate themselves with. The process of knowledge, of going from an abstract to a concrete understanding (as we will see in a later section), is itself a dialectical process. One cannot skip the necessary moments required to understand something concretely. This doesn't mean, however, that one must endure the time it took to get from one moment to another in the sphere of universal history, but simply that the development and process is itself necessary. As Hegel noted in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,

What in former ages engaged the attention of men of mature mind, has been reduced to the level of facts, exercises, and even games for children; and, in the child's progress through school, we shall recognize the history of the cultural development of the world traced, as it were, in a silhouette.[22]

It would be quite difficult for a worker, peasant, or uneducated militant to engage directly with the works of Ilyenkov and Vaziulin without any background in philosophy and Marxist theory. One must build themselves up to being able to understand these richer forms of creative Marxism. The manuals aided as a 'first step' in this climb. It is in this context in which Western Marxist's synecdochally rooted rejection of a Marxist *weltanschauung* should be understood.

However, the manual's popular character should not make them immune to critique, since, without critiquing them you cannot overcome them as a 'first step.' But the critique they receive must be grounded on a conscious understanding of their character as popular textbooks. This is completely absent in the Western Marxists who use these simplified worldview formulations to scratch off a whole tradition (Marxism-Leninism) and the *weltanschauung* manner in which it understands Marxism. However, Lukács and Gramsci – whom Western Marxists see as the fathers of their tradition's revolt against Soviet orthodoxy, do not engage in critique in the same form their self-proclaimed students do. For instance, Lukács critical review of Bukharin's *Historical Materialism* (1921) does not conclude with a wholesale

21. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 14* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 103.
22. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 16.

condemnation of Bukharin and of the formulation of Marxism as a worldview. Instead, while being upfront about its status as a popular textbook, he rightly demonstrates how Bukharin's text suffers from what he calls "false objectivity," "bourgeois, natural-scientific materialism," and "fetishism," and shows how these faults were not found in Plekhanov's and Mehring's similar attempts at a popular textbook.[23] This sort of critique is also seen in Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci takes the same Plekhanov 'manual' Lukács praises above and characterizes it as "vulgar materialism," providing a similar critique as the one Lukács levied against Bukharin.[24] Gramsci would also, like Lukács, criticize Bukharin's *Historical Materialism* and argue that he degraded dialectics into a "subspecies of formal logic and elementary scholasticism."[25] He never, however, took this as an opportunity to provide a wholesale condemnation of the Marxist-Leninist worldview, and understood these vulgarizations as just that, vulgarizations of a richer and more open Marxist worldview.[26]

Here we have Western Marxists' favorite supposed 'rebels' against 'soviet Marxism' and Marxism-Leninism championing the Marxist *weltanschauung* while rightfully criticizing those who distorted it and brought foreign bourgeois elements into it. These two 'rebels,' however, merely repeat the criticism Lenin had already made of Bukharin and the second international Marxists. As Lenin expressed in a 1922 'Letter to the Congress' on Christmas eve, Bukharin had "something scholastic about him (he has never made a study of dialectics, and, I think, never fully understood it)."[27] Additionally, who can forget Lenin's aphorism from his 'Conspectus to Hegel's *Science of Logic*,' namely, that "none of the Marxists have understood Marx."[28] Therefore, as I have showed, one can hold on to the conception of Marxism as a *weltanschauung* while critiquing the

---

23. Georg Lukács, "Technology and Social Relations," In *Marxism and Human Liberation* (New York: Delta Books, 1973), 51-52.

24. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 387.

25. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 435.

26. To be clear, although Bukharin's textbook provides a Marxist outlook which reduces everything to technological development, the work of recent Marxist Ecological thinkers such as John Bellamy Foster and Ian Angus shows that Bukharin, for all his flaws, was at the forefront of developing – along with Verdansky and other Soviet scientists – a Marxist ecology. In his *Historical Materialism*, the fifth chapter on "The Equilibrium between Society and Nature" engages with Marx's concept of metabolism and metabolic rifts. Likewise, the speech he presented to the International Congress of the History of Science and technology in London in 1931 is extremely rich ecologically and sustains the dialectical unity of theory and practice in a much more concrete manner – showing that he was no longer the amateur dialectician Lenin wrote about before dying.

27. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 36* (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 595.

28. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38*, 180.

exponents of vulgarized and simplified forms of the Marxist *weltanschauung*. This position did not have to wait for Lukács or Gramsci, it was already in Lenin. Further, it was in Lukács, Gramsci, Ilyenkov, et. al., because it was in Lenin, and because they were faithful to the Marxist-Leninist *weltanschauung*.

The foolishness of Western Marxists' logic should now be apparent: homogenize all soviet Marxisms to its most elementary expression, then, use this elementary expression to fully reject Marxism as a worldview. It is the equivalent of rejecting evolutionary theory *en toto* because a 9th grade textbook simplified Darwinism. In laypersons terms, it is the tossing of the baby out with the water. The Western Marxist rejection of a Marxist *weltanschauung* is grounded in a combination of the previously mentioned infantilism and a predisposed sentiment that looks weary upon any 'worldview or grand narrative.' When unmasked we see the latter is nothing more than what Ellen Meiksins Wood called the "disease" of postmodernism which has infected the body of the Western Marxists, making them reject anything which smells like grand narratives and universalistic discourse.[29] Additionally, these bourgeoisfied 'Marxist' tendencies aren't necessarily a result of spontaneous theoretical developments; instead, as Gabriel Rockhill's work on the Global Theory Industry has shown, the works of the classical authors from the New Left and the Western Marxist tradition are grounded on a political economy of knowledge that is backed by Western capitalist state departments and intelligence agencies (as well as by major capitalist foundations) which benefit from the dissemination of this compatible, anti-Communist 'Marxism'.[30] Marxists must reject this revisionist infiltration doomed to revolutionary pessimism and affirm the Marxist *weltanschauung*, that is, a dialectical materialist ontology and epistemology. This *weltanschauung* is not a closed and static one (like some of the manual phraseology could have made it seem), but one which is open, dynamic, and *critically receptive* to the latest studies in the sciences for readjustments or expansions in its dialectical method and mode of thinking. As Engels had noted in *Ludwig Feuerbach*, with "each epoch-making discovery in the sphere of natural science," dialectical

---

29. Ellen Meiksins Wood, John Bellamy Foster, et.al., *In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 10, 6.

30. For more see: Gabriel Rockhill: "The CIA and the Frankfurt School's Anti-Communism" *Philosophical Salon* (June 27, 2022); "Foucault: The Faux Radical" *Philosophical Salon* (October 12, 2020); "Foucault, Anti-Communism, and the Global Theory Industry: A Reply to Critics" *Philosophical Salon* (February 01, 2021).

materialism must accordingly change its form.[31] Let us now examine the ontological aspect of the Marxist *weltanschauung*.

Dialectical Materialist Ontology

In his *Dialectical Materialism*, Henri Lefebvre uses Marx's *Capital* and Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* to say that "the laws of human reality cannot be entirely different from the laws of nature."[32] A similar sentiment is expressed in the posthumously published *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, where Lukács says that it is "self-evident" that "the dialectic could not possibly be effective as an *objective principle of development* of society, if it were not already effective as a principle of development of nature before society."[33] Precisely because of this universal character, argued Lefebvre, is that dialectical materialism "acquires the full dimension of a philosophy: it becomes a general conception of the world, a *weltanschauung* and hence a renewal of philosophy."[34] In the last section we defended the treatment of Marxist philosophy (i.e., dialectical materialism) as a *weltanschauung*, now let us present its ontological basis.

Objective dialectics, i.e., the dialectical materialist ontology, first and foremost holds that the world is dominated by change and interconnection, "nothing is eternal but eternally changing."[35] It acknowledges that "movement is itself a contradiction," and that "contradiction propels movement."[36] These are the

---

31. Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 2018), 26.

32. Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 95.

33. Georg Lukács, *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (New York: Verso Books, 2000), 30. What is interesting about this affirmation is that for most Marxist scholars, the 'break' between 'western' and 'soviet' Marxism (and hence, the beginning of the 'Engels debate') occurs first in Georg Lukács' famous sixth footnote of the first chapter in his 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*, where he says that "Engels–following Hegel's mistaken lead–extended the [dialectical] method also to knowledge of nature." Instead, argued Lukács, the dialectical method should be limited to "historical-social reality." What those who have banked on this footnote forget, or are unaware of, is that Lukács comes to reject his own position to the point of "[launching] a campaign to prevent the reprints of his 1923 book." Lukács had argued that his book was 'outdated,' 'misleading,' and 'dangerous' because "it was written in a 'transition [period] from objective idealism to dialectical materialism.' " Additionally, he was quite explicit in arguing that " '[his] struggle against… the concept of dialectics in nature' was one of the 'central mistakes of [his] book.' " For more see my review of *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectic of Nature* cited above.

34. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 95-96.

35. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 40.

36. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 28.

basic premises of dialectics pertaining to the ontological constitution of the world. It is important to note, however, that these central premises make it an ontology of becoming, not being. Insofar as being is understood as an unchanging, pure, universal substratum, it is rejected as an explanatory category. If being, however, is understood as a constant "coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be," that is, if it is understood as becoming, then it can be sustained as a foundational category in a dialectical materialist ontology.[37] Nonetheless, as Hegel noted, although "the first truth is to be found in becoming," this first concrete category is still an abstract first step which gives way to a more concrete understanding of the world.[38] If we stop here, then, we have merely achieved the position of Greek (more specifically Heraclitan) dialectics mentioned above. Although, as Engels said, "the new age begins with the return to the Greeks – negation of the negation," this return is mediated by half a millennium of metaphysically framed scientific studies,[39] and therefore, it is not a return to the same Greek dialectic, but to a richer (more concrete) one.[40] Hence, what is required is not just the understanding that everything is in constant motion and interconnection, driven by internal contradictory forces, but a concrete understanding of the mechanisms and structures through which these changes occur.

The dialectical materialist ontology, as an ontology of becoming, is concerned with the "most general laws" of human and natural "historical development" and "of thought itself."[41] Marx and Engels both agreed that these laws had already been discovered by Hegel, but in a mystified form. For instance, Marx says in a letter to Dietzgen that "The true laws of dialectics are already contained in Hegel, though in a mystical form," and Engels similarly repeats this by saying that "all three [laws of dialectics] are already developed by Hegel… [but] foisted on nature and history as laws of thought, and not deduced from them."[42] These 'laws' are 1) the unity and struggle of opposites, 2) the transition from quantity into quality and vice versa, and 3) the negation of the

37. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), § 187.

38. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge and Kegan, 1968) 283.

39. I am using 'metaphysics' here in the way Engels and Marx do, as a way of analyzing things statically and isolated from the interconnections in which it exists. I must note, however, that this is not the same way metaphysics is defined in the history of philosophy.

40. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 195.

41. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 63.

42. Karl Marx, "Marx to Joseph Dietzgen," May 9, 1868, In *Marx-Engels Collected Works Vol 43* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 31; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 63.

negation. It is important to note that Hegel never referred to them as ‘laws’; in his *Logic*[s] they are merely categories, little different than the plethora of other categories his logical unfolding of the concept introduces. However, the reason behind Marx and Engels’ classification of these Hegelian categories as ‘laws’ lies in the fact they can be seen in every ‘moment’ of the movement of Hegel’s concept, and most importantly, because Marx and Engels ‘re-discover’ them in the movement and interconnection of nature and society and postulate their objective existence as the source for their reflective (subjective) existence in the mind. These three dialectical laws, by being the most universal forms in which change occurs, are also the most abstract, and hence, serve as the base upon which a more concrete understanding of change and interconnection in smaller or larger organic totalities can take place.

It is here where the accusations of simplifying dialectics usually begin. Once these three laws are established, it becomes a game of examples, whoever can fit the schema of these laws on nature, human society, history, or thinking the most wins. In treating these laws as a “sum total of examples,” Lenin argued, “dialectics usually receives inadequate attention.”[43] For Lenin the architype for this was Plekhanov, although at times, he argued, “the same is true of Engels.”[44] To be clear, the problem is not the examples in themselves, but when dialectics is *en toto* reduced to a collection of examples. When this reduction takes place, Chris Arthur is right to say that dialectics turns into a “lifeless formalism” which proceeds by “applying abstract schemas adventitiously to contents arbitrarily forced into the required shape.”[45] However, one must not confuse this vulgarization of dialectics to mean that one cannot provide examples in nature, society, or thinking that confirm these laws. Like we saw in the previous section, one can hold onto Marxism as a *weltanschauung* and simultaneously reject vulgarizations of this *weltanschauung*. Similarly, one can reject the reduction of dialectics to a basket of artificially foisted examples but still use examples to understand objective dialectics. After all, the central difference between the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics is the latter’s materialist position that dialectics is the ontological condition of the world, and only when this world is concretely understood does dialectical thinking emerge. It is necessary, then, to use concrete examples from the world to understand the world itself, and hence, grasp objective dialectics subjectively.

---

43. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38*, 357.
44. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38*, 357.
45. Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital* (London: Brill, 2004), 3.

The materialist dialectic, therefore, must walk a thin line between two precipices into idealist dialectics: on the one hand, if no concrete examples are used, the 'dialectic' would be purely mental, and hence, idealist; on the other hand, if examples are artificially fabricated out of an apriorist dialectical schema foisted onto the world like a cookie cutter, then the 'dialectic' one is proposing replicates at its core the same mistake of Hegel's demiurgos, except at a much more vulgarized level, lightyears away from the genius with which Hegel espoused his. The theoretical panacea and balancing pole necessary to avoid falling into the precipices of idealism is the dialectical method of going from the abstract to concrete. Only in the rigorous process of investigation required for this method can one be sure that their examples are actually in-the-world, and not foisted on it by an abstract dialectical schema. An exposition of this method will have to wait until the following section.

It is this context in which Engels deduces the dialectical laws in his scientific studies, and Marx in his economic studies. The examples they provide are concrete, and (esp. in the case of Engels) usually include comments on how science already accepted (in certain fields) these 'laws' but under different names. For instance, in Engels' letter to Friedrich Albert Lange, he argues that the "modern scientific doctrine of reciprocity of natural forces [is] just another expression or rather the positive proof of the Hegelian development on cause & effect, reciprocity, force, etc."[46] Let me now provide a few concrete examples in which these most general laws of change and interconnection can be observed. Recall that by being the 'most general' they are also the most abstract, and hence, each example is in itself insufficiently understood if the only thing one says is how one or another of these dialectical laws is observed in it. To be concretely understood, each of these examples must take the structural appearance of the laws as a mere starting point to the investigation of the phenomenon. The laws work like the study of a townhouse community; by knowing how the outside of each townhouse looks, one has grasped the most general fact in the community. This 'most general' fact can then serve as the abstract starting point for the concrete study of the internal structural differences in each household. One cannot claim to know the community by simply knowing the 'most general' fact, and similarly, by only knowing the differences in each household one is blind to the 'most general' fact that the object of one's study is not independent houses, but a townhouse community.

---

46. Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Lange," March 29, 1865. In *Marx-Engels Collected Works Vol 42* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 138.

The Three Ontological Laws of Dialectics in Political Economy

"The most important aspect of dialectics," Hegel argued, is the "grasping of opposites in their unity."[47] Similarly, Marx would say in *Capital* Vol. I that the "Hegelian contradiction [is] the source of all dialectic."[48] Lenin would repeat this by saying that "the division of a unity into two and the cognition of its contradictory parts is the essence of dialectics."[49] It is thus, with the law of the unity and struggle of opposites that we must begin, for the "condition for the knowledge of all processes in the world in their 'self-movement,' in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites."[50] It is this law which allows the understanding of the other two, for not only does it "furnish the key to the 'self-movement' of everything that exists; it alone furnishes the key to the 'leaps,' to the 'interruption of gradualness,' to the 'transformation into the opposite,' to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new."[51] Let us now see how Marx observes the functioning of this law in the realm of political economy.

The law of the unity and struggle of opposites can be seen from the dawn of Marx's *Capital* with the commodity, the "cell-form of bourgeois society" and "germ of all contradictions."[52] Commodities, as Marx says, have an "internal opposition inherent in them," namely, they are "at once use-values and values."[53] As Roslyn Wallach Bologh adds, "the commodity is this contradictory relation, a totality of opposing moments: production of exchange value which excludes use value and the realization of exchange value which requires use value."[54] The commodity, the "simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday *relation* of bourgeois society," presents us with a clear example of the law of the unity and struggle of opposites.[55] Since, as Lenin said, the commodity is the "germ of all the contradictions," we can see similar examples in more 'concrete' categories in Marx's *Capital*.[56] For instance, merchant's capital, Marx argues, "presents… a

47. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, §69.
48. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 596.
49. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 357.
50. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 358.
51. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 358.
52. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 358-359. Lenin uses 'cell,' Marx uses 'cell-form.'
53. Marx, *Capital Vol. I,* 104.
54. Roslyn Wallach Bologh, *Dialectical Phenomenology: Marx's Method* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 64.
55. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 358.
56. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol 38*, 359.

unity of opposing phases, a movement that breaks up into two opposing actions – the purchase and the sale of commodities."[57] This cell-form of bourgeois society, as the unity of the opposing forces of exchange and use value (and in its metamorphosis of commodity and money), is the "most abstract form of crisis," and contains within it (implicitly or *in itself*) the general crisis of capitalist production, which, in its periodic actualizations, provides the "manifestation of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy."[58] In all the contradictions of capitalist production as a whole we have lucid examples of the law of the unity and struggle of opposites, and, as Marx adds, "the most abstract forms are recurring and are contained in the more concrete forms."[59] In regard to social class, for instance, the capitalist mode of life is marked by the contradiction between the working and the capitalist class. These two classes are both *struggling* amongst themselves and in *unity* under capitalism, that is, capitalism contains – not externally, but in itself – two opposing forces whose struggle shapes its development. As Lenin argued, once the understanding of the unity and struggle of opposites is grasped, we are 'furnished' with the keys to understand the other laws of movement.

The law of the unity and struggle of opposites, or what is the same, the law of the universality of contradictions, would be enriched by Mao Tsetung's 1937 essay "On Contradiction." Here, Mao develops important categories relating to the *particularity of contradictions*, further concretizing the dialectical materialist ontology and its ability to understand the concrete concretely. The first important categorial development is the notion of principal and secondary contradictions. As Mao notes, "there are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions."[60] It becomes an imperative, therefore, to "devote every effort to finding [the] principal contradiction" in whatever complex process one is studying, for "once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved."[61] Likewise, Mao notes that in any contradiction, i.e., in any unity of opposites, there is always one antipole which is dominant. This is what he calls the

57. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. III* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 391.

58. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value Vol. II* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 509, 507.

59. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value Vol. II,* 509.

60. Mao Tsetung, "On Contradiction," In *Five Essays on Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Language, 1977) 51.

61. Tsetung, "On Contradiction," 53.

principal aspect of a contradiction, it refers to the "aspect which has gained the dominant position."[62] This dominant position is not static, but always subject to change; what is the principal aspect in one moment may turn into the non-principal aspect in another.

Additionally, Mao refines the law of the unity and struggle of opposite by recapturing a distinction Lenin had already noted between antagonisms and contradictions. Lenin argued that "antagonism and contradiction are not at all one and the same… under socialism, the first will disappear, the second will remain."[63] Mao clarifies this by showing that "antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites."[64] Class societies are bound, sooner or later, to develop "the form of *open antagonism*" which shifts the class struggle into a moment of revolution.[65] In Gramscian terms, these are the moments when the emphasis is switched from the war of position (the battle for hegemony) to the war of maneuver, where the opposites engage in direct frontal attacks. Sometimes non-antagonistic contradictions develop into antagonistic ones, and likewise, antagonistic contradictions develop into non-antagonistic ones.[66] Contradictions obtain an antagonistic form in moments of explosion, when "open conflict to resolves old contradictions" takes place and new things are produced.[67] Recognizing whether a contradiction is antagonistic or not is fundamental to the process of resolving it. For instance, the working and the capitalist class are in an irreconcilable antagonism, one which can only be solved through the working class's revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class. The utopian socialists, for example, did not see the antagonistic character of this contradiction, and therefore, their 'resolutions' involved the harmonizing of class distinctions through an appeal to the benevolence of the owners. History has shown that the incorrect assessment of the relationship between the antipoles of worker and capitalist has produced unsatisfactory resolutions which either became relics of the 19th century, or, in the case of similar strategies by the social democrats, sustained the dominance of capital over labor. On the other hand, the contradiction between the peasantry and the working class is not, on most occasions, an antagonistic one; therefore, the resolution must take (and has taken) a radically different form, one which

62. Tsetung, "On Contradiction," 54.
63. V. I. Lenin, "Remarks on N. I. Bukharin's *Economics of the Transitional Period" Selected Works,* Russ. ed., Moscow-Leningrad, 1931, Vol. XI, p. 357.
64. Mao, "On Contradiction," 68.
65. Tsetung, "On Contradiction," 69.
66. Tsetung, "On Contradiction," 70.
67. Tsetung, "On Contradiction," 69.

unites the peasantry and the working class, under the leadership of the latter, in the struggle for socialism.

After having grasped the law of the unity and struggle of opposites, and how this general law was concretized by Mao, we may examine the law of the transition from quantity to quality and vice-versa. In the transition from money into capital we have an example of the law of the transformation of quantity into quality. For money to be transformed into capital, that is, into something qualitatively new, surplus-value needs to be created. For this to happen, it is necessary for a specific amount of money to be turned "into commodities that serve as the material element of a new product," and further, to "incorporate living labor" onto this "dead substance."[68] If the labor-power incorporated creates only the value necessary for the laborer's subsistence, i.e., if it produces an equivalent to the exchange value it was bought for, then no surplus could be realized. However, what "really influenced" the buyer [i.e., the capitalist] of labor-power was "the specific use-value which this commodity possesses of being *a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself*."[69]

To create surplus value, and hence, materialize the use value for which the labor-power was bought (viz., to be a source of "more value than it has itself"), that labor power must be extended beyond the time it took it to produce the amount of value it was bought for.[70] As Marx says, "if we compare the two processes of producing value and of creating surplus-value, we see that the latter is nothing but the continuation of the former beyond a definite point."[71] This "definite point" is what Hegel call "nodal points" in his *Logic*[s], it is the moment when "gradual [i.e., quantitative] increase… is interrupted" and the result is "a leap from quantitative into qualitative alteration."[72] The quantitative extension of the working day beyond the time necessary to produce the value the labor-power was bought for is how surplus-value arises. A quantitative accumulation of working hours, at a 'definite point' [i.e., nodal point], produces a qualitative leap and surplus-value comes about. Quantitative change has resulted in a leap into something qualitatively different. This qualitative leap into surplus-value, "a process which is entirely confined to the sphere of production," creates the conditions for the "metamorphosis of money

68. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 195.

69. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 193.

70. Marx, *Capital Vol. I,* 193.

71. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 195.

72. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* translated by George di Geovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 321-322.

into capital," another qualitative leap effected by the transcendence of labor-power beyond this 'nodal point.'[73]

There is a plethora of other places where the law of the transition of quantity into quality can be observed in *Capital*. For instance, Marx says that "not every sum of money, or of value, is at pleasure transformable into capital;" a "certain minimum of money or of exchange-value must be pre-supposed in the hands of the individual possessor of money or commodities."[74] This is because there is a nodal point at which the variable capital [i.e., labor-power] involved in production turns the owner into a capitalist proper. "The guilds of the middle ages," Marx argued, "tried to prevent by force the transformation of the master of a trade into a capitalist, by limiting the number of labourers that could be employed by one master within a very small maximum."[75] This fetter presented in the middle-ages prevented the development of the capitalist proper. Only when this fetter is broken can "the possessor of money or commodities actually turn into a capitalist."[76] This transformation occurs "in such cases only where the minimum sum advanced for production greatly exceeds the maximum of the middle ages."[77] Marx then explicitly says that "here, as in natural science, is shown the correctness of the law discovered by Hegel (in his "Logic"), that merely quantitative differences beyond a certain point pass into qualitative changes."[78]

These feudal fetters would be eroded as the barbarism of primitive accumulation evolved. As Marx says, "these fetters vanished with the dissolution of feudal society, with the expropriation and partial eviction of the country population."[79] This "historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production" is the "fundamental condition" for the development of the capitalist mode of production.[80] Its history is written in the "annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."[81] The history of this expropriation, of the

---

73. Marx, *Capital Vol. I,* 194-195. This latter transformation requires the surplus-value produced in the moment of production to return to the moment of circulation and realize itself. As Marx says in *Capital* Vol. III, "industrial capitalist merely realises the previously produced surplus-value, or profit, in the process of circulation." Marx, *Capital Vol. III*, 283.

74. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 307-308. This is the example Engels uses in his *Anti-Dühring* when discussing the law of the transformation of quantity into quality.

75. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 308-309.

76. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 309.

77. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 309.

78. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 309.

79. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 751.

80. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 714, 774.

81. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 715.

usurpation and enclosure of the commons, is the "prelude to the history of capitalism," and produces "the first negation of individual private property."[82] This first negation establishes, as we saw previously, a qualitatively new mode of production – capitalism. "But," Marx would go on to famously say, "capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation."[83] Capitalism immanently creates the conditions were,

> Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.[84]

Here we have the clearest depiction, within the lens of universal history, of the law of the negation of the negation. Capitalist private property negates "self-earned private property."[85] It socializes production and creates for the first time ever a "division of labour in the workshop."[86] Its private "mode of appropriation" at a nodal point presents a fetter to the centralized and socialized means of production, immanently creating its own conditions for its sublation [i.e., negation of the negation].[87] This is a process which involves the "expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people," and hence, is expected to be "incomparably [less] protracted, violent, and difficult" than the capitalist negation of feudalism.[88]

---

82. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 762-763.
83. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 763.
84. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 763.
85. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 774.
86. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 359. "Division of labour in the workshop, as practices by manufacture, is *a special creation of the capitalist mode of production alone*."
87. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 763
88. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 764.

As can be seen from the examples in political economy, these dialectical laws are interconnected. The internal contradiction in all things propels universal movement. At times – in the nodal points mentioned above – this movement breaks its quantitative gradualness and undergoes a qualitative leap. All qualitative leaps are negations of that which has undergone a qualitative transformation. These negations immanently create the conditions for their own negation and bring about, in certain nodal points, a negation of the negation. No negation fully annihilates that which it has negated, part of it is always preserved in the qualitatively new it has unfolded into. For instance, capitalism sustains feudal private property but cancels out feudal individualized production; socialism sustains the socialized production of capitalism but cancels out its privatized accumulation. These are, of course, simple examples; but they are nonetheless helpful pedagogical tools to understand the most general laws of movement and interconnection, and hence, to build the base necessary for knowing more concrete things concretely.

Dialectical Laws in Nature and the Emergentist Dialectic

As was shown at the beginning of our section on dialectical ontology, the presence of these dialectical laws in the natural world grounds their existence in the realm of human sociality and thought. After establishing concrete examples of these laws at play in political economy, a plethora of examples in the natural world could be provided. However, instead of proceeding to give more examples of their existence in the natural world (and continue to fit the collection of examples stereotype), I'd like to shift my focus to a concept which has developed in the sciences which presents a helpful tool for thinking of the relation of these laws in the world. As we previously saw with Engels' letter to Lange, Engels (and Marx) held that natural science was already confirming all of these laws, but often referred to them under different names, or failed to attribute their conceptual source to the dialectical tradition. This is the case with the concept of *emergence*. It is, in essence, a form of understanding these three laws through one concept. This connection has been developed by Kaan Kangal in his work on Engels' "emergentist dialectic," where he goes as far as to say that "Engels cleared the way for establishing a dialectical-materialist ontology of emergence."[89]

89. Kaan Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics," *Monthly Review* Vol. 72 N. 6 (November 2020).

Kangal argues that "scholars from diverse backgrounds invariably agree" that "what is indispensable… in Engels's work on philosophy and natural sciences" is "the emergentist character of Engels's dialectics."[90] This can be seen in the work of Zbigniew A. Jordan, who argued in his text, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism* (1967), that "the central idea of emergent evolution is to be found in *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature*."[91] Jordan adds that

The central idea of emergent evolution is the logical product of the three following assumptions: material reality has a multilevel structure; each of these levels is characterized by a set of distinctive properties and irreducible laws; and each level has emerged from temporally prior levels according to laws which are absolutely unpredictable with respect to those operating at the lower levels. These levels can be considered either epistemologically as the levels of scientific knowledge, such as physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, and so forth, or ontologically as the corresponding objective structural levels of the external world.[92]

Emergentism develops as a way to escape the problems of reductionism and determinism, namely, the view that "all higher-level causes can be reduced to nothing more than the outcome of the laws operating at lower levels."[93] In opposition to this, emergentism holds that,

The constituent parts of an encompassing whole acquire their integral status in that their properties come into existence by means of their interaction and interpenetration, which eventually bring about a specific mode of organization peculiar to the whole in question. Note here that parts do not come together in order to make a whole to which they belong. Rather, their very interaction structures the way they are interrelated and interpenetrated, resulting in what is called a whole.[94]

Wholes are not reducible to the sum of their parts and higher forms of movement are not reducible to the movement that occurs "at the level of atomic and subatomic matter."[95] For instance, as Malcom Jeeves and Warren S. Brown

90. Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics."

91. Zbigniew A. Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 166.

92. Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism*, 167.

93. Malcom Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2009), 111.

94. Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics."

95. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 111.

explain, “an amoeba, as a complex organization of molecules, has properties that do not exist in the molecules themselves.”[96] “The activity of the amoeba,” they add, “is governed by the current state of the organization of these molecules, not the properties of the molecules themselves.”[97] “The activity of the amoeba,” therefore, “is an emergent property.”[98]

A good example of emergentist qualities is found in Marx’s discussion of cooperation in *Capital*. As I mentioned before, capitalism introduces for the first time in history a division of labor within the manufacturing process itself, and in this process of collaboration it effects “the creation of a new power, namely, the collective power of masses.”[99] As Marx argues, “a dozen persons working together will, in their collective working-day of 144 hours, produce far more than twelve isolated men each working 12 hours, or than one man who works twelve days in succession.”[100] The structure of cooperative work allows for the emergence of new qualities (substantially increased productive capacities) not reducible to the amount of working hours, nor the individuals which worked them. This is not just the case with humans. As Jeeves and Brown note, ant colonies develop emergent qualities such as “intelligent behavior” (e.g., the ability to solve “spatial mathematical problems” such as locating the food sources closest to the ant colony) when they act as colonies.[101] The solutions they provide as colonies are “beyond the capacity of individual ants.”[102]

This does not mean that the laws which operate at the lower levels are uninfluential for those which operate at a higher level. On the contrary, they create the conditions for the activity of the higher level. But this higher level of activity is not determined by the lower level, that is, one cannot reductively explain the activity of the higher level simply by an appeal to the lower levels. As Engels writes in *Dialectics of Nature*,

This is not to say that each of the higher forms of motion is not always necessarily connected with some real mechanical (external or molecular) motion, just as the higher forms of motion simultaneously also produce other

---

96. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion,* 112.
97. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 112.
98. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 112.
99. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 326.
100. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 326.
101. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 113.
102. Jeeves and Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology, and Religion*, 113.

forms, and just as chemical action is not possible without change of temperature and electric changes, organic life without mechanical, molecular, chemical, thermal, electric, etc., changes. But the presence of these subsidiary forms does not exhaust the essence of the main form in each case. One day we shall certainly "reduce" thought experimentally to molecular and chemical motions in the brain; but does that exhaust the essence of thought?[103]

Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin provide a helpful distinction between reduction and reductionism which helps clarify how emergentist dialectics analyzes these changes: "Reduction looks to lower levels of analysis for differentiating symptoms of forces at higher levels, whereas reductionism claims that forces at lower levels are the actual causes of the phenomena higher up."[104] As Kangal explains, "low-level and high-level phenomena are by no means linked by immediate causality," instead, "they are intermediated by Hegelian 'nodal points.' "[105]

Kangal states that "when the organic world grows out of the inorganic, it develops specific forms of movement and its own special laws… [however], what historically precedes the development of the organic world, that is, the inorganic, lives on in a "sublated" form."[106] This process of sublation is another way of describing the law of the negation of the negation, which, as we previously saw, contains within it the law of the transition from quantity into quality (each negation is an example of a 'qualitative leap'), and presupposes such contradictory forces within bodies which allow – in certain nodal points – this qualitative transformation to take place. This capacity for immanent transformation (what Lenin calls "self-movement") is what the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela have termed *autopoiesis* in their text, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. The transitions from the lowest levels of inorganic bodies to the highest levels of organic bodies is dialectically interconnected by the transcendence of certain nodal points which give way to qualitatively new levels with emergent properties not reducible to the sum of its current parts or to the qualities of the lower levels it presupposes. Hence, in line with dialectical materialism's basic ontological premise concerning universal interconnection and movement, Kangal affirms that the "dialectical emergentist is at pains to *integrate*, and not

103. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 251.

104. Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins, *Biology Under the Influence: Dialectical Essays on Ecology, Agriculture, and Health* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 136.

105. Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics."

106. Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics."

juxtapose, parts of a whole in differentiated degrees of organization of matter."[107] In so doing, the dialectical materialist *weltanschauung* provides the conditions for the most comprehensive understanding of the world in its utmost concreteness.

How the Dialectical Materialist Ontology Understands Categories

Before we move on to our section on the dialectical method, it is important to say a few things about how the dialectical materialist *weltanschauung* understands categories. There are three central points which have to be made.

First, we must note that the concept of 'category' itself is not constrained within the limits of cognition. Categories are not simply a "list of all original pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding contains a priori."[108] Since the dialectical materialist *weltanschauung* holds no separation between ontology and epistemology, categories are not a filter which prevents us (along with our sensible intuitions) from knowing the world as it really is. An ontological *ding an sich*, separated from how it is *for others*, is as much an "empty abstraction" for the dialectical materialist as it is for Hegel.[109] The dialectical materialist *weltanschauung* holds that categories, although understood subjectively, depict objective conditions in the world. Their understanding in the mind is a reflection of their existence in the objective world.

Secondly, it is important to note that in the dialectical materialist worldview the traditional categorial sets in philosophy (e.g., subject/object, appearance/essence, quantity/quality, part/whole, identity/difference, positive/negative, freedom/necessity, abstract/concrete, particular/universal, cause/effect, etc.) are not understood through the metaphysical framework of either-or. As Engels states, "dialectics… knows no hard and fast lines, no unconditional, universally valid 'either-or' and bridges fixed metaphysical differences," recognizing instead of 'either-or,' "both this – and that."[110] This is a basic consequence of the law of the unity and struggle of opposites. Examples of how these categorial sets are understood in their unity can be

107. Kangal, "Engels' Emergentist Dialectics."
108. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 132.
109. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, §22.
110. Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 216.

found all throughout this introduction.[111] The only thing I must add is that sometimes a new category arises to describe their unity (e.g., reciprocity with the categories of cause/effect), and other times it doesn't (e.g., subject/object is just subject-object).

Thirdly, besides the above mentioned categorial sets present in all totalities, particular totalities usually contain their own objective categories. Hence, we can speak about the categorial development of Marx's *Capital* and understand that most of the categories which are unfolded are historically specific to the capitalist mode of production. In fact, a big part of the 'critical analysis' Marx is doing involves precisely the removal of the 'eternal halo' bourgeois political economist attach to categories in capitalism. Marx's recognition of the historical (i.e., not eternal), character of the categories of capitalism is a process of exposing the 'unknown knowns,' that is, the presuppositions which sustain the "scientific impotence" of bourgeois political economists.[112]

Let us now turn our focus to the dialectical method, i.e., the mode through which objective dialectics is accurately reflected as subjective dialectics.

The Dialectical Method: From Abstract to Concrete

As we have been formulating in this introduction, the dialectical materialist worldview contains two central parts – an epistemology and an ontology. These two parts cannot be understood wholly separated from one another. Instead, they must be understood dialectically, that is, as interconnected parts of human practice. Now that we have covered the ontological dimension of the dialectical materialist worldview, the ground has been set to examine the epistemological dimension, that is, the dialectical materialist method of engaging with the world.

In the introduction to the notebooks which compose the *Grundrisse* Marx describes the "scientifically correct method" as one in which "abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought."[113] The correct method involved the movement from the abstract

111. For instance, we saw how an organism and its environment function as subject-objects at the beginning of this introduction; how emergentist dialectic changes how we see the relationship of parts and wholes; how quantity transforms into quality and vice versa; etc.

112. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 13.

113. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 101.

"simple relations" to the concrete, that is, that which contains a "concentration of many determinations," a "unity of the diverse."[114] We can see this method at work in *Capital*'s categorial development from the commodity in Vol. I to the categories that emerge in Vol. III, where the object of study is capitalist production as a whole. The analysis of price, rate of profit, various types of capital, etc. in Vol. III involves an investigation of the "concrete forms which grow out of the *movements of capital as a whole*."[115] These 'concrete forms' are concrete because they "approach step by step the form which they assume on the surface of society, in the action of different capitals upon one another, in competition, and in the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves."[116] These categories more richly reproduce the concrete in thought. They are more concrete because they are concentrations of more determinations than the categories of the previous two volumes.

The order of *Capital*'s categorial development is not arbitrary (as Engels had argued about Hegel's categorial development in his *Logic*),[117] but necessary. The less concrete-simple categories (we may call them abstract, although they're *not purely abstract*) *have* to be understood for the more concrete-complex to be grasped. Marx is very explicit about this, for instance, in referring to competition he says that,

A scientific analysis of competition is not possible, before we have a conception of the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are not intelligible to any but him, who is acquainted with their real motions, motions which are not directly perceptible by the senses.[118]

Each category is where it needs to be, its unfolding is systematic, not arbitrary, or simply historical. As Marx says in the *Grundrisse*, it would be "unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive."[119] Whether the commodity came before price historically is not the concern; instead, what is at

---

114. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100-101.

115. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. III*, 25.

116. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. III*, 25.

117. As Engels says in a letter to Conrad Schmidt, "the transitions from one category or from one contradiction to the next are nearly always arbitrary." Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt," November 1, 1891. In *Marx-Engels Collected Works Vol 49* (New York: International Publishers, 2001), 286.

118. Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 316.

119. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 107.

stake is the sequence in which these categories must be understood to grasp the capitalist mode of production as a whole concretely.

A concrete understanding of the more concrete-complex categories presupposes an understanding of the less concrete-complex ones. Here is where the confusion of the old economists lay, they begin with what Marx called the "imagined concrete," with the totality containing within it the most determinations (e.g., population), and in so doing treat the concrete abstractly.[120] One can only end up understanding the *real concrete* abstractly if one doesn't understand the *real abstract* concretely. As I have argued elsewhere

Concrete thought, instead, must be thought of as a process of ascension from the less concrete (the most abstract), to the most concrete. As Marx says, the "reproduction of the concrete by way of thought" is "not a point of departure" but the result of "a process of concentration."[121] *Concrete thought, then, contains abstract thought as a necessary moment in its ascension towards the concrete reproduction of the concrete. However, it overcomes this abstract immediacy by gathering the plethora of determinations which a thing presupposes in a manner which reproduces in the mind the active relations these determinations have with each other within a given totality.*[122]

Therefore, as Henri Lefebvre has noted, "the concrete, from a certain point of view, is also abstract;"[123] or, a As Evald Ilyenkov eloquently states – "the ascent from the concrete to the abstract and the ascent from the abstract to the concrete are two mutually assuming forms of the theoretical assimilation of the world… each of them is realized only through its opposite and in unity with it."[124] Contrary to this dialectical ascension, the treatment of concrete totalities by political economists engages the concrete directly, thereby failing to building up to it through a concrete unfolding of the less concrete; this is what leaves them merely engaging with empty wholes, with an 'imagined concrete'. As Marx affirmed, the concrete always "appears in the process of thinking… as a concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure."[125] To know totalities

120. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100. This is also what Marcuse called "false concreteness" – Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 313.

121. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse,* 100.

122. Carlos L. Garrido, "The Dialectical Ascension from the Abstract to the Concrete," *Midwestern Marx* (July 28, 2022).

123. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 76.

124. Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2022), 139.

125. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse,* 100.

(e.g., capitalist production as a whole) concretely, and hence, to accurately reproduce them in the mind, it is necessary to undergo the tedious process of systematically recreating its logically necessary moments. This must not be understood historically (even if it is not ahistorical), that is, the unfolding of 'moments' required to understand *Capital* as a whole does not depict a historical chronology but a systematic-logical one; "the historical passages [viz., part 8 'The So-Called Primitive Accumulation'] complement the theoretical account, but they don't constitute the theoretical account."[126] Price is a more concrete category because it requires all the previous categories to be understood for one to understand price itself. You can *partially* understand the category of a commodity without yet understanding the category of price. However, it is impossible to understand the category of price without first understanding the commodity, and how, through its immanent contradiction-driven movement, the conditions are created for price to be understood.

The dialectical method of going from the abstract and simple to the concrete and complex is better understood, as Martin Nicolaus points, as a "method of presentation," which is in essence, as Michael Heinrich calls it, a "dialectical presentation of categories."[127] It is, as Lefebvre noted, "nothing less than the complete reconstruction of the concrete in its inner movement."[128] This reading of the dialectical method has propelled a school of thought (stemming in the West from the work of Chris Arthur, Tony Smith, et. al.) which aims to provide a 'new' or 'systematic' reading of *Capital* (usually in connection with Hegel's *Science of Logic*), that is "concerned with the articulation of categories designed to conceptualize an existent concrete whole."[129]

The nature of the abstract to concrete dialectical method also creates conditions where once one gets to the more concrete categories, the previous categories themselves are capable of being more concretely understood, for then one can retroactively see their necessary role in the unfolding of more concrete categories. As Heinrich notes,

---

126. Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, 32.

127. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 61; Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, 37.

128. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, 74.

129. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 4. The focus of these two strands is usually in the categorial development of Marx's *Capital* and its homology to Hegel's *Science of Logic*. In Smith the comparison is much more pronounced, as his reading of Hegel argues that his more 'idealist' aspects were metaphors and pandering to the Christian audience. On the other hand, Arthur thinks there is a fundamental ontological difference between the two, namely, that Hegel is an idealist and Marx is not.

Since Marx represents his object of inquiry on different levels of abstraction that mutually imply and complement each other, the theory of value and surplus value dealt with in the first volume can only be fully understood at the end of the third volume. [Hence], *what one believes to know after reading only the first volume is not only incomplete, but in fact distorted*. [130]

Lenin has previously given us the grueling task of understanding Hegel's *Logic* to understand Marx's *Capital*, now Heinrich adds that one must understand volumes two and three of *Capital* to understand volume one. These tasks, grueling though they may be, imply nothing 'new' or uniquely tedious. What Heinrich is saying is somewhat commonsensical: only in the end can one fully understand the beginning. This is not something necessarily unique to *Capital*. It is common knowledge that, as Schopenhauer said, all good books should be read twice, for "only when we know the end do we really understand the beginning."[131] One could likewise say that your understanding of *Godfather I* is only fully concrete when you finish the trilogy. It is only natural, then, that a complete reading of *Capital* (the three volumes) is the condition for the possibility of a complete reading of the beginning of *Capital* (Vol. I).

Heinrich's statements on the reading of *Capital* themself depict a dialectical truth, namely, that the 'moments' in the unfolding of a totality are enriched as their progenitors actualize themselves in more concrete forms. It isn't simply the case that a study limiting itself to the acorn amputates the possibility of understanding its complete organic process, moreover, the acorn as acorn would itself be incompletely understood. It would be reified and it's understanding merely abstract. Hence, the acorn in itself is better understood in light of its immanent unfolding into the oak tree. To understand price, you need to understand value, but to fully understand value you need to see it in light of its reflection into price. The relationship is reciprocal, each creates the conditions for the other to be understood concretely. The dialectical exposition, then, requires a dialectical reader too. The reader must realize that *repetitio est mater studiorum*, the beginning must be re-read in light of the completion of the text.

However, this implies something Vaziulin (one of the great minds of the tradition of soviet 'creative Marxism') clarifies in his work, namely, one can only use the dialectical method of going from the abstract to the concrete with matured totalities. Vaziulin argues that,

---

130. Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, 9.

131. Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Reading and Books," In *Parega and Paralipomena Short Philosophical Essays Vol. II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), 559.

The ascent from the abstract to the concrete is not the product of pure thought but a reflection of a real organic whole. The real existence of an organic whole is a necessary prerequisite for the application of the method of ascent from the abstract to the concrete. The application of this method is possible insofar as the internal relationships of an organic whole have been sufficiently developed.[132]

A young totality, in its embryonic stages of development cannot be subjected to this dialectical method of investigation. The concrete which is sought to be replicated in thought is itself not completely concrete yet. This stage requires merely an observational treatment, to have its activities jotted down in bluebooks for those who come later to investigate. As Nikolai Chernychevsky said, history is like a grandmother, "terribly fond of its smallest grandchildren… to latecomers it [gives] not the bones but the marrow."[133] This is true not just for the peoples of the world, but for the interpreters of it too. Capitalism required maturation for Marx to analyze it as a totality, and hence, to treat it with the abstract-concrete dialectical method. History gave Adam Smith the bones and Marx the marrow.[134]

This method stays like an unlocked character in a video game when the totality is still in an infant stage. The abstract-concrete approach of the dialectical method is not something, then, that one 'applies' onto the world. Marx expressed in an 1858 letter to Engels his critique of Ferdinand Lassalle's "silly concoction" in his *Heraclitus* text; because Lassalle attempts to 'apply' dialectics, he argued that

[Lassalle] *will discover to his cost that it is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system.*[135]

---

132. V Vaziulin (1986), Voshozdenie ot abstracktonovo k konkretnomu [The Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete]. In: Ozutsviev Z and Sheptulin A (eds) *Marksistko-lenininskaja dialektika: v 8 tomah* [Marxist-Leninist Dialectics in 8 Volumes], vol. 2. Moscow, Russia: MGU, pp. 190–199. Retrieved from Dafermos M. Rethinking the relationship between Marx's Capital and Hegel's Science of Logic: The tradition of creative Soviet Marxism. *Capital & Class*. 2022;46(1):77-93. doi:10.1177/03098168211029003

133. Nikolai Chernychevsky, "Kritika filosofskikh preubezhdenii protiv obshchinogo vladeniya [Critique of philosophical prejudices against communal ownership of the land]," In Chernyshevsky, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, 4;424-475, Moscow: Ogonyok, 1974. Retrieved from Marcello Musto (2020), *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography*, 51.

134. What has history given us? Perhaps Salmonella.

135. Karl Marx, "Marx to Engels," February 1, 1858. In *Marx-Engels Collected Works Vol 40* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 259, 261.

The dialectical method is not an apriorist 'application' onto the world, instead, it is something that is derived from the world precisely at the specific historical conjunctures where the emerging totality under examination qualitatively leaps into a stage of maturity and its essential characteristics are capable of being grasped, and hence, reflected in the human mind (i.e., subjective dialectics). The dialectical method is not a mantle one puts on the world, but a gift the world affords those industrious and courageous enough to investigate it. As Marx reminds us with the words of Dante, "at the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell, the demand must be made:

> qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto
> Ogni viltá convien che qui sia morta"[136]

Conclusion

In sum, the materialist dialectic at the core of the Marxist *weltanschauung* constitutes a unity of a dialectical ontology and epistemology. This unity holds that the world is dominated by change and interconnection, and that if we study the world concretely, we may begin to decipher the forms and structures through which change and interconnection take place. Since "freedom does not consist in an imaginary independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws and in the possibility which is thus given of systematically making them work towards definite ends," the concretization of our knowledge of the world is simultaneously the expansion of potential human freedom.[137] For this potential freedom to become actual, the 'definite ends' towards which we make these laws work must be crafted *by* the mass of people *for* the mass of people. In so far as development takes place within the constraints of modes of life governed by class antagonisms, this 'potential freedom' will fail to actualize itself in the mass of people. Therefore, as you go through this anthology of classical Marxist texts dealing with the question of dialectical materialism, always recall that Marxism serves as a guide to action, as an outlook which seeks to change (as opposed to merely interpret) the world.

---

136. "Here must all distrust be left; all cowardice must here be dead." Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 23.

137. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976), 112.

Hence, your study of the dialectical materialist worldview ought to always be *grounded on and aimed towards* revolutionary praxis.

6

The Contradiction of Exchange and Use Value in American Healthcare

Edward Liger Smith[1]

In *Capital, Volume I*, Karl Marx begins with his analysis of the commodity — a section that has famously perplexed first-time readers.[2] Yet this is the only logical point of departure, as Marx identifies the commodity as the "cell-form" of bourgeois society.[3] From this starting point, he develops his critique dialectically, expanding outward from the commodity to the broader structures of the system — at least as far as he was able before his death. The contradictions and crises that define capitalist society, Marx shows, are best understood through an analysis of commodity production. In that light, the many dysfunctions of the American healthcare system are symptoms of the same foundational logic that governs all of capitalist society.

---

1. Eddie Liger Smith is an Executive of the American Communist Party and a Director of the Midwestern Marx Institute.

2. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990 [1867]).

3. *Ibid*, p. 125.

Every commodity under capitalism can be understood in terms of three distinct but interrelated forms of value: use-value, exchange-value, and value proper. While these terms can initially appear to be confusing, their meanings are crucial to grasping Marx's critique. "Value," in the strict sense, refers to the amount of labor needed to produce a product – that is, the amount of socially necessary labor time needed to create the commodity in the process of production. Exchange-value refers to the amount of money that the commodity can be sold for on the market which is expressed through its price, which can be measured quantitatively. This allows all commodities to be commensurable with one another, meaning they can all be measured through their prices, which roughly correspond to their value. Finally, use-value is the qualitative aspect that cannot be measured numerically. It refers to the utility or usefulness that a buyer gets from the commodity. It is only through possessing use-value that a commodity can be sold at all, yet it is use-value that is most often subordinated under capitalist production.

This contradiction between use-value and exchange-value lies at the heart of countless social ills under capitalism, and perhaps nowhere is it more starkly revealed than in the American healthcare system.

The American healthcare system operates on a for-profit capitalist basis, meaning its primary objective is to generate surplus value and return profit to owners and investors. These profits are distributed among Wall Street shareholders, hospital system executives, doctors who own private practices, and even the highly compensated administrators within the so-called "non-profit" sector. The system as a whole comprises a sprawling network of institutions—including pharmaceutical companies, insurance providers (both private and public), hospital conglomerates, nursing homes, ambulance services, medical equipment and software firms, rehabilitation centers, and more. The goal of these entities is not to provide the best possible care to their communities (that is, to prioritize healthcare as a use-value), but to remain financially solvent and, ultimately, to deliver profit to those who own or control them. This dynamic is not the result of personal greed or the moral failings of the individuals who own healthcare companies — though the logic of capital accumulation may encourage those traits. Rather, it is a structural feature of the system itself: healthcare corporations must generate a profit or they will be driven out of business by rival companies. Healthcare firms are driven by market competition to make as much money as possible and accumulate a financial surplus measured in dollars. Thus, the pursuit of profit, not the well-being of patients, governs the logic of the American healthcare system.

At the heart of capitalism lies a fundamental contradiction between exchange-value and use-value. A society that organizes production around the goal of accumulating exchange-values in the form of profit, surplus, and capital cannot be a society organized around meeting human needs. The capitalist mode of production is, at its core, irrational: it manages production anarchically for the enrichment of those who own capital. This contradiction can be seen most clearly in the American healthcare system. Here, the consequences of subordinating use-value to exchange-value are not abstract — they are painfully concrete, as nearly every American has either experienced the system's cruelty, inefficiency, and exploitation.

The Insurance Industry

Let's begin by dismantling the health insurance industry. These companies operate as mafia-style middlemen with no role in actually administering medical care. Their sole function is to extract monthly payments from working people and then deny or minimize payouts when care is needed. Their business model depends on this contradiction: they profit by charging as much as possible while covering as little as possible. Like every other capitalist enterprise, their goal isn't to ensure public health—it's to generate surplus value.

Bernie Sanders' beloved "Medicare for All" proposal is essentially an effort to nationalize the bulk of the insurance industry — transforming it into a publicly owned, nonprofit system.[4] Unsurprisingly, this was decried by NPR and other bourgeois media outlets as a step toward "socialized medicine," painting it as dangerously radical.[5] Meanwhile, Barack Obama's "Obamacare" was framed as a moderate compromise — a so-called half-measure. But in truth, even Medicare for All falls short of true systemic reform. It attempts to patch up the insurance model without addressing the rest of the for-profit healthcare infrastructure and still leaves room for private insurers to operate. And Obamacare actually traces its origins to a policy blueprint drafted by the

4. Tami Luhby and Tal Yellin, "Medicare for All Explained," *CNN* (March 2020): https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/03/politics/medicare-for-all-annotated/

5. Danielle Kurtzleben, "Here's What's in Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All Bill," *NPR* (September 14, 2017): https://www.npr.org/2017/09/14/550768280/heres-whats-in-bernie-sanders-medicare-for-all-bill

Heritage Foundation — one of the most powerful right-wing think tanks in America, bankrolled heavily by the insurance industry itself.[6]

The lust for surplus value gives rise to an entire ecosystem of swindlers and parasitic middlemen — figures who wedge themselves between buyers and sellers to siphon off profit without adding any real value. These actors inflate prices, distort markets, and commodify essential goods and services. The insurance industry is a textbook example, thriving in the vacuum left by America's nearly fully deregulated, market-driven healthcare system. Even capitalist countries in Europe — and our neighbor to the north — have reined in the parasitic insurance industry through universal healthcare systems that drastically reduce the role of for-profit insurers.[7] This stands in stark contrast to the privatized system that runs rampant in the United States.

The Contradiction of Preventative Care

It is well established in the field of public health that preventative care is one of the most effective strategies for maintaining a healthy population.[8] Regular exercise, a nutritious diet, clean environments, and early detection of illness all significantly reduce the need for expensive medical interventions later on. Yet, within the American healthcare system, the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value once again reveals itself. In a rational system oriented toward human well-being, investments in preventative care would be prioritized. However, under a capitalist system organized around the pursuit of profit, healthcare firms maximize revenue not by keeping people healthy, but by ensuring a steady demand for services. The sicker the population becomes, the greater the profits for hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and insurance providers. In this way, the commodification of healthcare produces outcomes that are not only irrational, but actively harmful to public health.

A chronically ill patient is a permanent customer—not only for the hospitals and clinics that provide their care, but also for the pharmaceutical companies

---

6. Timothy Noah, "The Heritage Foundation Disowns Its Baby," *MSNBC* (August 21, 2013): https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/the-heritage-foundation-disowns-its-baby-msna153581

7. Emma Wager and Cynthia Cox, "International Comparison of Health Systems," *KFF: Health Policy 101* (May 28, 2024; updated October 30, 2024): https://www.kff.org/health-policy-101-international-comparison-of-health-systems/?entry=table-of-contents-introduction

8. Mike Battista, "Why Preventive Care Is Important," *Creyos* (April 24, 2024): https://creyos.com/blog/why-preventive-care-is-important

that supply their ongoing treatments. It is no coincidence, then, that the prevalence of chronic illness has steadily increased in the United States, even as medical technology has advanced.[9] This is yet another manifestation of the deeper contradiction at the heart of a commodified healthcare system: institutions have little material incentive to foster a healthy population. Instead, their profits depend on the continuous sale of medical services and products. In a system driven by the pursuit of exchange-value rather than human well-being, sickness itself becomes a profitable commodity.

Countries like Cuba, which have made their entire healthcare systems publicly owned and operated, have demonstrated the transformative power of prioritizing preventative care. Through comprehensive community health programs, proactive illness monitoring, widespread public health campaigns promoting nutrition and exercise, and citizen education on hygiene and disease prevention, Cuba has built a model focused on the health needs of the population rather than profit.[10] Despite suffering under a crippling U.S. embargo for over sixty years, Cuba has achieved a lower infant mortality rate than the United States and maintains a comparable life expectancy. The country is internationally recognized for its success in disease management and early prevention efforts.[11] If a small, blockaded island nation can achieve such outcomes by removing the drive for exchange-value from healthcare and focusing solely on use-value for the community, one can only imagine what a country as wealthy as the United States could accomplish under a rational, public-centered system.

The Surgical Industry

Physicians carry with them an air of authority, and most people would probably find it hard to believe that their doctor would suggest a surgery they don't actually need. If you are one of these people, you may be shocked to learn that C-section births are on the rise in the United States, despite the fact that they

---

9. Gabriel A. Benavidez, Whitney E. Zahnd, et al., "Chronic Disease Prevalence in the US: Sociodemographic and Geographic Variations by Zip Code Tabulation Area," *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy* 21(1) (2024).

10. C. William Keck and Gail A. Reed, "The Curious Case of Cuba," *American Journal of Public Health* 102(8) (2012): e13–e22. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2012.300822

11. Edward Liger Smith, "The American Healthcare System is Failing Rural America: What's Causing it and How Do We Fix It?" *Midwestern Marx* (April 26, 2022): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/the-american-healthcare-system-is-failing-rural-america-whats-causing-it-and-how-do-we-fix-it-by-edward-liger-smith

are more dangerous for both the mother and the child. Even the World Health Organization, a state arm of the healthcare bourgeoisie, has warned about the unnecessary growth in cesarean deliveries.[12] And everyone within the healthcare industry knows the real reason why: C-section births are more expensive, and they generate more profit for whichever capitalist controls the hospital conducting the delivery—a fact that these institutions often conveniently forget to explain to expecting mothers.

There is even a growing skepticism among doctors, surgeons, and rehabilitation specialists about the validity of labrum surgeries. Many feel that the procedure is often unnecessary, as the prospects for recovery appear to be nearly as high for patients who forgo surgery as for those who undergo it. Increasingly, medical professionals believe that labrum surgeries are being overprescribed in the pursuit of monetary gain — or, as we have described throughout this article, the prioritization of exchange-value and the extraction of surplus value in its monetary form.[13] This example hits close to home for me, as I have seen many people through the sport of wrestling suffer greatly and experience more problems after getting this procedure, while I have also seen multiple people make full recoveries without ever undergoing surgery.

The Pharmaceutical Industry

The pharmaceutical industry is one that makes more money the more medicine you need, and its primary goal at all times is to maximize profit. A 2020 CDC survey found that 49.9% of Americans had taken a prescription drug within the past 30 days, revealing that millions of Americans rely on the pharmaceutical industry on a daily basis.[14] Added to this is the growing rate of diabetes, which can lead to a life-or-death dependence on insulin. The pharmaceutical industry, of course, only benefits from creating lifetime customers, even if it signals that the overall health of the population is steadily deteriorating.

---

12. World Health Organization, “Caesarean Section Rates Continue to Rise amid Growing Inequalities in Access,” *World Health Organization* (June 16, 2021): https://www.who.int/news/item/16-06-2021-caesarean-section-rates-continue-to-rise-amid-growing-inequalities-in-access

13. Paul A. Salamh and Joel B. Gagnier, “The Biopsychosocial Model and Shoulder Pain: A Scoping Review of the Literature,” *PLOS ONE* 14(7) (2019): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31498374/.

14. SingleCare Team, “Prescription Drug Statistics 2025,” *The Checkup by SingleCare* (February 4, 2025): https://www.singlecare.com/blog/news/prescription-drug-statistics/#:~:text=A%202021%20CDC%20national%20survey

The most glaring example of the pharmaceutical industry's public health failures — and perhaps the greatest failure of the American healthcare system as a whole — is what has become known as the opioid crisis. Opioids are a class of drugs that include both prescription pain relievers like oxycodone and morphine, as well as illegal substances like heroin. They work by binding to opioid receptors in the brain and body, reducing the perception of pain while also producing feelings of euphoria, which makes them highly addictive. Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing for decades afterward, the pharmaceutical industry aggressively promoted the idea that these medicines were a harmless and effective tool for managing pain — perhaps after undergoing an unnecessary procedure like a labrum surgery. Billions of dollars were spent lobbying hospitals to prescribe more opioids, and even more insidiously, lobbying medical schools to indoctrinate young physicians with the belief that prescribing large quantities of opioids was a normal and compassionate part of their job. Pharmaceutical industry think tanks even developed a strategy of smearing those who raised concerns about the addictive nature of opioids, branding them as "opiophobic" and accusing them of being indifferent to patient suffering.[15]

While opioids can have some medical value in small doses, extended use of large quantities will almost always lead to addiction and a multitude of negative consequences. The stories are endless of Americans who got hooked on oxycodone after a surgery and literally ended up homeless and on heroin after they ran out of money to continue buying their prescriptions from walgreens. Today the crisis of opioid abuse is responsible for an estimated 800,000 deaths at least, and 80,000 Americans continue to die every year from fentanyl use.[16] Lawsuits against the companies involved have forced them to pay millions in settlements, an infinitesimal fraction of the money they made from selling these drugs, and all the top people involved have been allowed to continue working in pharmaceuticals, albeit often under a new name. A sudden clampdown on opioids has also made the situation worse in many ways, as so many Americans are already addicted, and often turn to street drugs when their medical supply runs dry.

---

15. Nora D. Volkow and Francis S. Collins, "The Role of Science in Addressing the Opioid Crisis," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 377(1) (2017): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32661741/.

16. USAFacts Team, "Who Is Overdosing on Fentanyl?" *USAFacts* (May 29, 2024): https://usafacts.org/articles/who-is-overdosing-on-fentanyl/

Opioid commodities were a win-win for the pharmaceutical industry. Their exchange value was exceptionally high, and one of their use-values — at least from the perspective of capital—was their ability to create lifetime customers. For the vast majority of the population, however, it has been a lose-lose situation. But then again, the system was never designed to serve them in the first place. At least we can pop a hydrocodone and, for a little while, forget that we live in a society where the ruling class profits from poisoning us.

Holistic Medicine

So-called holistic medicine refers to medical practices that often originate from the East, such as acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, and meditation.[17] There is abundant evidence demonstrating that acupuncture, in particular, offers a wide range of health benefits, especially in the treatment of chronic pain, while many traditional Chinese herbal remedies have also been shown to improve health with minimal or no side effects.[18] This stands in stark contrast to most American pharmaceutical medications, where the majority of a full-length commercial is often spent listing the drug's numerous and severe side effects.

Despite the proven benefits of Holistic or Eastern Medicine, it is rarely covered comprehensively by insurance plans in the United States. The reason is simple: the same financial interests control all sectors of the healthcare system. The people who own shares in the insurance industry are often the same people who own shares in the pharmaceutical companies, the hospital systems, and so on. All of these institutions share a vested interest in sidelining holistic medicine to preserve the chronic care model—a model that creates endless customers and generates unlimited profits. Eastern medicine is relatively cheap to administer and emphasizes preventative care and the maintenance of long-term healthy lifestyles. This approach is not conducive to a business model that relies on populations dependent on daily pharmaceutical drugs and frequent doctor visits. Holistic medicine threatens the extraction of surplus value from the sick and vulnerable, and thus it is routinely smeared as quackery by the institutions that profit from the status quo.

---

17. Charles Preston, "Holistic Medicine," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (November 20, 2024): https://www.britannica.com/science/holistic-medicine

18. Andrew J. Vickers, Angel M. Cronin, et al., "Acupuncture for Chronic Pain: Individual Patient Data Meta-analysis," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 172(19) (2012): 1444–1453. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22965186/.

Yet despite these efforts, holistic medicine has persisted and even grown in the U.S., precisely because of the use-value it offers to those seeking genuine health and wellness. Naturally, its growth has also attracted a number of scam artists, whose predatory practices unfortunately lend credibility to the attacks against holistic medicine. Nevertheless, a rational healthcare system would integrate the best of Traditional Eastern Medicine with modern scientific practices, emphasizing treatments that achieve the best public health outcomes. This is precisely the goal that Xi Jinping outlines in *The Governance of China*, where he describes China's efforts to integrate traditional and modern medicine in order to better serve the health of the people.[19]

My Struggle with Lyme Disease

The reason I write so much about the American healthcare system is because I have a personal vendetta against it. When I was five years old, I was bitten by a deer tick during a camping trip and soon developed what's known as a "bullseye rash" — a tell-tale sign of Lyme disease. The side effects of the disease included fatigue, Bell's palsy, a random tingling sensation on the skin that felt like raindrops, joint pain, headaches, fever, chills, and swollen lymph nodes. The most common treatments for Lyme disease are doxycycline and amoxicillin; I was prescribed the latter. At first, it worked. But like a growing number of Lyme patients, my symptoms returned a few months later — including the most inexplicable and haunting ones, like the sensation of rain on my skin even while indoors.

Over many years of hardship with the medical system, I came to learn that there is a deep divide within the medical community over the existence of chronic Lyme disease. At its core, the conflict stems from the fact that many Western medical professionals and institutions deny chronic Lyme's existence, largely because they are unable to treat it successfully. Again and again throughout my childhood, I discovered that acupuncture and other holistic treatments consistently produced better health outcomes for me than anything the mainstream medical system could offer. This experience is not unique to me — it is a common story among chronic Lyme patients, and increasingly, among Lyme patients in general.[20]

---

19. Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014).

20. Edward Liger Smith, "Chronic Lyme Disease: Misdiagnosis and Treatment," Midwestern Marx (April 26, 2022): https://www.midwesternmarx.com/articles/chronic-lyme-disease-misdiagnosis-and-treatment-by-edward-liger-smith

In short, the for-profit healthcare industry cannot treat Lyme disease as effectively as holistic medicine, so many arrogant professionals simply argue that it does not exist. This is a perfect example of the broader approach these institutions take toward medicine and public health. If an ailment that afflicts hundreds of thousands of Americans cannot be easily treated with a pill or surgery, then in the eyes of the medical establishment, it effectively does not exist. Their priority is profit, and anything that does not contribute to that profit is dismissed or ignored. Even if individual physicians do not personally believe this, it is the ideology they are systematically indoctrinated into through years of medical education — education that is heavily funded by for-profit healthcare corporations.

Conclusion

Marx explained that capitalism represents commodity production in its most highly developed form. Under capitalism, everything in life is transformed into a commodity, and every sphere of existence becomes a means of generating profit. It is precisely this kind of degeneration that the story of Jesus driving the moneylenders from the temple warns against: the corruption that occurs when what is sacred is reduced to a mere tool for personal enrichment.

The healthcare system in America has become little more than a means for personal enrichment. Positive health outcomes, when they occur, are largely accidental byproducts of general technological progress — not the result of any effort by those who sit atop the healthcare industry extracting surplus value from below. Healthcare today is a commodity, and the contradiction between exchange-value and use-value manifests itself in every direction. Childbirth has become a way to extort burgeoning families for thousands of dollars. Injured people stumble away from ambulances in terror of the bills they will face. Car accident victims suffering from concussions are asked which local hospital is ”in-network” before they can receive care. This so-called healthcare system is a parasitic, money-sucking scheme, robbing people blind — or worse, hooking them on pills—at their most vulnerable moments.

Only capitalism could create such a perverse system, and only socialism can bring it to an end. The American Communist Party, like the traditional Communist parties before us, seeks to build a robust healthcare system that prioritizes public health and preventative care. We envision a system that

administers healthcare with a focus on its use-value for the population, not one obsessed with its exchange-value or the amount of surplus value it can extract.

A more irrational system than this could scarcely be imagined. Yet a massive barrier stands in the way of changing it: capitalism itself, and the capitalist ruling class that has captured the American state and largely controls its healthcare institutions, including the National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization. The only force capable of remedying this situation is the American working class, which holds the power to overthrow the dictatorship of capital through political struggle.

The American Communist Party seeks to be the vehicle for the working class, and our policy program includes a clear and expansive plan for transforming healthcare into a system that truly serves the public. Profit should have no place in healthcare — whatsoever. While policies like Medicare for All aim to nationalize the insurance industry, we seek to nationalize the entire system. No longer will they be allowed to profit off our grandparents' strokes or our children’s chronic illnesses. No longer will they trap working people who suffer injuries on the job into a lifetime of opioid addiction. Their system is crumbling, and we will be the force that breaks it and builds it anew in a sublated form — a form of society that works for itself, not for those who happen to own the land, the banks, the means of production, or the healthcare infrastructure.

A new world is possible, and the American Communist Party is leading the charge to fight for it!

RED AMERICA

is a publication of the American Communist Party.

Issue #007
May 2025

Subscription information

redamerica.acp.us